

COLONEL CODY'S DOUBLE DISGUISE!

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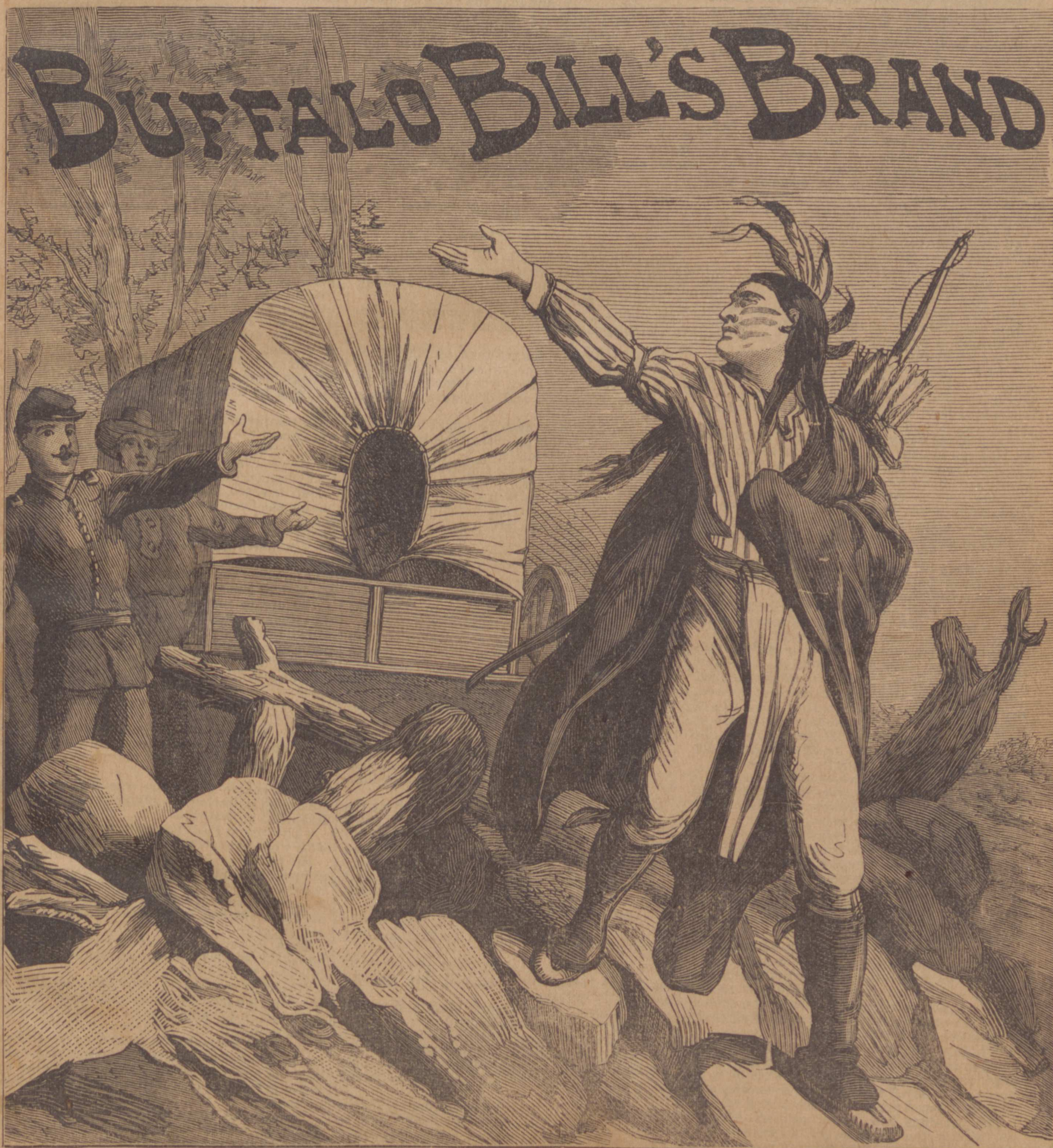
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Vol. LXI.



"GOOD-BY, PARDS! IF I GO UNDER, IT IS IN A GOOD CAUSE," CRIED BUFFALO BILL AS HE SPRUNG OVER THE RUDE BARRICADE.

Buffalo Bill's Brand;

OR,

The Brimstone Brotherhood.

A Romance of Army, Scout and Wild Life in
the True Wild West.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

AUTHOR OF "WILD STEER RIDERS," "SILK
RIBBON SAM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FORLORN HOPE.

"MEN, Death holds ninety chances to Life's
one, and unless help comes we are doomed."

The words were uttered with the calm courage
of a brave man who felt that he and those
about him had to die.

Those addressed did not flinch under the
almost certain fate—a fate appalling to contem-
plate, for they were soldiers at bay, and red-
skins surrounded them upon all sides.

The one who uttered the words wore the rank
of a captain of infantry. He was about forty-
five years of age; his face was full of courage,
nobility of nature and kindness well blended—at
once the soldier and the gentleman.

With officers and men alike Captain Lucius
Kennerley was most popular, and those now in
dire danger felt that if they could be extricated
from their peril he was the one to do it.

It was a commissary train of a dozen army
wagons, with an escort of six cavalymen under
a sergeant, and a detachment of infantry, with
Captain Kennerley in command of all.

Their destination was a frontier fort, fifty
miles distant from where they stood at bay.
They had been tracked by a force of Sioux, who
had been beaten back half a dozen times, yet
felt sure of their prey in the end.

There was one other in the command who
demands our notice, and that one now confront-
ed Captain Kennerley with the remark:

"I will volunteer, captain, to go after help."

All eyes were turned upon the man who dared
attempt to break through the Indian line.

The man was Buffalo Bill.

He was the guide, scout and hunter of the
outfit, and had brought the train thus far
where few could have done so, though when
within sight almost of the goal, they had met
the hostiles in strong force and had been forced
to make a halt and build a temporary fort.

"Why, Cody, it would be sheer madness to
make the attempt. I will not allow you to
sacrifice your life when, if we can hold them off
a couple of days, help may come," Captain Ken-
nerley responded decisively.

"And more likely it will not, sir, for, know-
ing that the Indians are about in large numbers
and not expecting the train, General Carr would
hardly send out a force from the fort."

"You may be right, and so we can only do
our best to stand them off as long as we can,
and then die like brave men, if die we must."

"I believe I can get help, sir," persisted the
scout.

"Show me in reason how, and you can make
the attempt, Cody, for well I realize and appre-
ciate your indomitable courage."

"You know, sir, that I speak the Sioux tongue
like an Indian and understand their ways well?"

"No one knows the red-skin better, Cody."

"Well, captain, my plan is to rig out as a red-
skin, from moccasins to head-dress, war-paint
and all, then slip out and get to the Indian line."

"I can make my way through, I believe,
reach their ponies, when it will be but a ride of
a few hours to the fort, and to-morrow I can be
back with a force that will make Brother Lo
get up and hump himself, or strike the trail for
the happy hunting-grounds."

"Cody, your words give me confidence that it
can be done, and, if so, you alone can do it.
Let me speak to you a minute," and Kennerley
led the scout apart a few paces.

Then he said, in a low, earnest tone:

"I have in my saddle-bags twenty thousand
dollars in Government money, and five thousand
in private funds, so I hope you can make the
run to the fort and not only to save the lives of
us all, but, I tell you frankly, should this money
be lost, it would reflect upon me from a cause
which I cannot explain."

"I will make the attempt, sir, and will pre-
pare my masquerade costume at once."

Going to one of the wagons Buffalo Bill got
into it and did not reappear until just at twi-
light, when he fairly startled those who sudden-
ly beheld what appeared to be a full-fledged In-
dian chief in their very midst.

"Buffalo Bill, you look the perfect Indian
chief in the disguise. Now go on your forlorn
hope, for upon you depend the lives of us all,
my brave fellow," said Captain Kennerley as he
warmly grasped the hand of the daring scout.

The pale-face had been completely metamor-
phosed into the red-skin, for the scout wore an
Indian outfit from moccasins to head-dress, as
he had said.

He had painted his face to the true coppery
hue, and daubed it with the war colors of the
Sioux, while his long black hair had been braid-
ed in with feathers and red streamers, a scalp-
lock being particularly conspicuous.

Hidden away and yet ready for instant use,
he had what a Sioux chief would have given a
squaw or two to possess—namely, a repeating-
rifle, pair of revolvers and a bowie knife.

Then, too, he carried a bow and arrows and a
flaming red blanket to add to his picturesque
appearance, and in the folds of which was con-
cealed the rifle.

It was now growing quite dark, and, except-
ing the guards on their posts, the rest of the
trainmen were gathered about the scout—some
two-score in all.

The men on duty were watching the encircling
line of red-skins, just out of range, and sur-
rounding completely, without a break, the train,
which was encamped in a clump of timber upon
a rise of the prairie.

At any minute, under cover of the darkness,
the Indians might make a rush in full force, as
they had before done, and then it would be a
fight to the death if they were not beaten off.

Here and there were belts of timber, which
had hidden the Sioux in the daylight. Beyond
one of these belts ran a stream of water, with
the ponies of the red-skins staked out on an open
space not far away.

Upon these the scout had fixed his eyes during
the afternoon, and had then arranged in his
own mind his plan of escape.

"Good-by, Cody, and may the Fates be good
to you!" said Captain Kennerley, and, as he re-
leased the hand of the disguised scout, going
upon his forlorn hope, one by one soldiers and
teamsters came up and wrung it, some in sil-
ence, some with a word of good cheer, and
others with a fervent:

"God bless you, Buffalo Bill!"

"Good-by, pard! If I go under, it is in a
good cause," and with these words Buffalo Bill
sprung over the rude barricade and disappeared
in the gloom toward the Indian lines.

CHAPTER II.

FOR OTHERS' SAKE.

THE keen eyes of Buffalo Bill had noted every
position of the red-skins surrounding the train,
and had selected the spot where he was to break
through that terrible death-line.

He realized, perhaps better than any one else,
what an appalling fate would be his if taken
alive.

He was the foe of the red-man, and had stood
as a barrier between the Indians and the settle-
ment for years; his name was famous as a dar-
ing scout, dead-shot and desperate foe when
aroused.

If taken by the savages, he would be consid-
ered a more valuable prize than the scalps of a
whole company of soldiers.

Where the prairie was slightly broken by
water-washes, with a stream fringed by cotton-
woods beyond, he made his way, and as he
neared the line dropped to a crouching position,
which came down to a creep as he heard the
low hum of voices.

"They are holding a pow-wow, and are
studying up some new deviltry," he muttered,
as he crept along the ground like a snake.

Not a firelight was visible, for the red-skins
wished to avoid attracting any attention, should
a scouting-party from the fort be passing near.

They had run their game to cover, and they
were plotting to bag it with the least loss to
themselves.

They had charged several times, but only to
be beaten back; and finding that they had to
deal with a most vigilant and stubborn enemy,
they had decided to use strategy.

Having recognized the well-known form of
Buffalo Bill, their deadliest foe, among the de-
fenders of the train, they knew that they had
to use their deepest cunning to out-cunning him,
for he would be up to all their tricks.

So the chiefs had gathered in council at the
very point for which Cody was aiming. They
were seated upon the prairie, in the shadow of
the cottonwoods bordering the stream. A cloud
of smoke from their pipes hung over their
heads. The faint spark of their pipes caught
the eye of the scout, so he crept nearer, until he
could see their dark forms.

"A dozen of them, eh? Well, they are in
larger force than I expected to have so many
full chiefs."

"I don't think I'll join their pow-wow to-
night, but their being here will help me, or I
am greatly mistaken."

"I'll play a bold hand, and bluff, and woe be
unto the red-skin who calls me."

The daring scout crept away to the left for a
hundred yards. He knew that the pow-wow
might break up at any minute, and the lines
then might be gathered too close to break
through.

His safety lay in being mistaken for an Indian
chief, if discovered, and so he determined to
boldly walk toward the lines, as though coming
from the council on the banks of the stream.

If he met one or two braves, well and good;
but if he came upon a number of them, then
the chances were a thousand to one for the
enemy.

Having gained the position he wished, he
arose to his feet, arranged his costume for a
fight or a foot-race, as the case might be, and
brought his weapons around ready for quick use.

Then, with the giddy, stately step of the In-
dian chief who held a high opinion of his own
importance, he started toward the timber, edg-
ing down the stream the while.

He soon found that he was nearer than he
supposed, for he heard voices, and saw several
red-skins standing together.

He did not seek to avoid them, but, adding
more dignity to his bearing, strode along almost
directly toward them.

That they saw him he knew, as well as he did
that not a shadow of suspicion did they feel
that he was not one of their chiefs.

One spoke to him, asking some question, but,
as though he did not hear, or, hearing, did not
heed, he walked directly on to the timber.

Into this he disappeared to come full upon a
guard, who had also had his eye upon him.

"The council of the chiefs has ended," said
the Indian, more as a question than an asser-
tion.

"Not yet," was the curt response in the Sioux
tongue, and the mock chief stalked on to the
stream's bank, congratulating himself upon
having safely passed through that ordeal.

He saw, beyond, the ponies of the red-skins
herded out upon the prairie, but he knew that
the stream was deep save at the fords, which
were numerous.

The chiefs had certainly ridden to the place
where they were holding their meeting, and
their horses would naturally be fastened back in
the timber, and he knew that they would be the
best mounted; so he turned up the stream, and
following the banks, soon came to the spot back
of the assembled chiefs.

The cottonwoods were not very thick, a mere
fringe along the stream, and he discovered, as
he expected, the horses of the chiefs grouped to-
gether.

That a red-skin guard might be there he
deemed quite probable, so was prepared for the
contingency.

In the starlight he saw the different animals,
and stepped up to one slightly apart from the
others, suspecting it to be the head chief's, and
therefore the best one of the lot.

As he placed his hand upon the lariat that
fastened him to a tree, a form suddenly ap-
peared, and a voice asked, in the Sioux tongue:

"Would the Red Rabbit take the horse of the
great chief, Snow Face?"

Buffalo Bill's thoughts flash like lightning
through his mind, in moments of deadliest dan-
ger, and he acts, always, with equal prompt-
ness.

He comprehended at once that the Indians
were under the command of a noted white rene-
gade, known as Snow Face, and more cruel to
his people even than were the red-skins, were
that possible.

He knew, too, that Snow Face was noted for
having the fleetest and best of animals, having
often owed his life to their speed and endurance
alone.

So the horse of Snow Face was the very one he
intended to have!

If he killed the brave who was the special at-
tendant of Snow Face, the body, when found,
would create surprise and alarm, as proving
that some one had gone through the lines! This
would force the red-skins to act with more dis-
patch and energy in their attack upon the train,
knowing help would come.

So he also discovered that he was taken for a
chief whom he had seen at the fort several
times, in friendly council, and who was known
as Red Rabbit.

There flashed into his mind, too, that this
same chief had a very effeminate voice, which
had also gained for him the name of Squaw
Tongue.

What course to pursue was plain; so in a
voice well imitating the effeminate tones of Red
Rabbit he answered:

"The Snow Face has sent the Red Rabbit
with word to his braves yonder, and—"

He had approached the unsuspecting brave
as he spoke, and instantly dealt him a stunning
blow on the temple, at which the red-skin
dropped like a log, and in less than half a min-
ute the scout had him bound, hands and feet,
and gagged.

Then he threw him across the back of the
horse, placed his blanket over him, and, mount-
ing, rode toward the stream.

He gave the horse the rein, knowing that he
would strike the ford, and a minute after came
to it, and in the animal went, forward, without
hesitation.

Cody did not wish to meet another Indian,
for he had but increased his danger in mount-
ing the horse of Snow Face, and having the
red-skin hanging across the neck of the splendid
animal.

If suspected, there was but one thing to do,
and that was to throw the red-skin to the
ground and run for it.

CHAPTER III.

"TO THE RESCUE, BOYS IN BLUE!"

BUFFALO BILL afterward said, in speaking of that night's desperate venture, that it must have been that the renegade's splendid horse was ashamed of the company he kept, and sought himself to escape from it, for, given the rein, he seemed to avoid every Indian group in the cordon around the train camp.

He went his way at a swift walk, and though several times he passed in sight of the red-skins, the horse shied around them of his own accord, while they had no suspicion that the horseman was other than one of their own number.

After a ride of half a mile the scout knew that he had left the red-skin line behind him, and so urged his horse into a canter.

The captive had recovered his senses, and writhed fearfully, at the same time uttering a smothered groan in his effort to utter a war-cry of alarm; but Buffalo Bill kept his fingers in close proximity to the savage's throat, and also held him in a grip which was not to be shaken off.

For several miles the splendid horse kept up his canter, the scout heading as straight for the fort as the nature of the country allowed, and yet feeling for the animal that was doing double duty.

"Never mind, good horse; you will soon have one less to carry, for yonder loom up the foothills," he said, encouragingly.

In half an hour more he rode into the timber-crowned foothills, and, as though acquainted with the country, sought a canyon, in which he halted.

"I am sorry for you, Brother Lo, but you must stand it or die," he muttered.

And dismounting he carried his prisoner to a tree to which he tied him so securely that escape was impossible, and, readjusting the gag in his mouth, placed the blanket around him, for the night was chilly, and turning to his horse which had been cropping grass the while, mounted and rode away.

Once out of the canyon the horse was put to a sweeping gallop and held to it.

Now and then a hill would be reached, and, springing to the ground, the scout would run alongside of the animal until it had been ascended and descended.

Several times a halt was made of a couple of minutes for a swallow of water; but the fine beast was forced ahead without mercy to save the human lives depending upon his speed and endurance and the pluck of his rider.

So it went on for hours, over the rolling prairie, across hills, fording streams, merciless to himself and his horse as well.

He had sprung from his saddle time and again and run by the side of his horse, and then again and again had drenched his nostrils with the cool water of the streams he crossed.

At last the Indian saddle was thrown away, the scout's blankets followed, then the bow and arrows, the lariat, and last, the rifle was hung in a tree to be gotten at another time, all to lessen the weight the brave beast carried, for every pound counted in that terrible ride by night.

"My God, what a superb brute you are!" cried Buffalo Bill, in admiration for the endurance and speed of the noble horse, as he knew that in five hours since leaving the corralled train he had covered forty miles.

"Come, old horse, it is but ten miles more, so now for it at a full run!"

And he urged the animal to his speed as a long stretch of level prairie was reached.

On, on, struggled the horse, breathing hard, wet with foam, and now and then stumbling with fatigue.

At last his pace slackened to a canter, then to a tottering trot and the scout knew that his endurance was ended; he had done all in his power and a splendid record had he made!

He gathered up his stake-ropes as he neared a small stream, and, slipping from the back of the broken down steed, hastily hopped him and then started on at a swinging trot on foot.

"Four miles to go from this tree," he said, as he plunged into the stream, buried his head in the clear waters an instant and then ran on.

Two miles were gone over and then there appeared a light ahead.

"The fort! the fort! At last I see it and I will save them!" fairly shouted Buffalo Bill. He ran along with renewed vigor at sight of the distant light, rising like a beacon of hope for him out of the prairie.

Tightening his belt he ran on, panting, weary, yet determined, and at last came near the stockade walls.

He raised his voice to hail the sentinel, but his throat was dry and he could hardly utter a sound.

He must advance until halted, and, a minute after, it came sharp and decided from the watchful sentinel:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"Buffalo Bill! I am in Indian trappings. Quick! call the corporal of the guard and send me to General Carr!"

With a great effort he hoarsely uttered the words, and the soldier, not being of obtuse mind, quickly obeyed, and, two minutes after,

the scout, dripping wet, his face streaked with paint, his hair and feathers in a sad plight, haggard-eyed and panting, stood in the comfortable quarters of General Carr, who had demanded that he be brought at once to his bedroom.

"Great God! Cody, can this be you, my dandyscout?" cried the general, as he beheld his chief of scouts.

"What's left of me, general. I have ridden and hoofed it fifty miles since dark to report Captain Kennerley and a commissary train corralled by Snow Face and three hundred braves over on the Medicine Trail."

"That is bad, but we must save them—Snow Face, that renegade chief, you say, and three hundred braves?"

"Yes, general."

"And Kennerley's force?"

"Twenty of his company, sir, a sergeant and six cavalrymen and a dozen teamsters."

"Orderly!"

An orderly appeared at the call and was commanded to ask Lieutenant Forrester to report at once to the general.

"I will send that wild young officer, Cody, for it will do him good. He is as brave as he is fast, and has the dash to get there on time."

"Besides, he may save himself a court-martial for some of his wild pranks; but how is it you are with Kennerley when I thought you were off with Captain Taylor on a scout?"

"He sent me back, sir, to see what the Indians were up to. I came across Captain Kennerley's trail and followed it."

"Duke, his guide, had just died from a wound, so I was bringing the train on when Snow Face corralled us; but, general, I'll go to my quarters and rig up for the ride."

"Not back with Forrester, surely?"

"Yes, sir! I can stand it with the half-hour's rest I get."

"Better send some one else."

"I know just where they are, general, and a delay might be fatal, while I have a horse and a prisoner I wish to pick up."

Cody hastily told of his escape and ride, and, as Lieutenant Fred Forrester entered the general's quarters, the scout departed to make his preparations to act as guide to the rescue-party.

The officer who entered was a dashing-looking young cavalry lieutenant of twenty-seven. His handsome face and superb physique had won for him the title of "The Adonis of the regiment," and yet, in spite of his being as prim as a dandy, he was noted for his dash and reckless courage, and had won fame on numerous occasions.

But there was not a more extravagant man in the army; he was as hard a drinker as he was a rider; he played cards as recklessly as he fought, and with such varying success that at times he was terribly in debt.

But, on duty, Forrester was the *beau-ideal* soldier, popular with his brother officers, the idol of his men, and ever ready to sacrifice himself to do a generous act.

"Mr. Forrester, I wish you to take thirty men of your troop, and as many from B Company, and start at once to the relief of Captain Kennerley, who is with a commissary train."

"I will send Captain Brown with a field-piece, a company of infantry, and the Indian mounted scouts, to follow your trail and support you, leaving at daylight."

"I thank you, General Carr, for the honor done me. I will start within half an hour, sir. Who is to be my guide?"

"Buffalo Bill!"

"I am glad of that! Good-night, general!" and the young officer, whom the orderly had found playing poker in his quarters, departed to obey orders, and within the time named he started to the rescue with three-score gallant boys in blue.

CHAPTER IV.

A PLEDGE TO THE DYING.

"I KNOW you, Cody, so set the pace and I will follow."

So said Lieutenant Fred Forrester as he rode out of the fort, with Buffalo Bill, thoroughly armed and splendidly mounted, in the lead as guide.

For a week Fred Forrester had been "going it wild," betting heavily, and in a streak of ill-fortune losing steadily.

He had never neglected his duties by day, and yet had played three-fourths of the night, and now, without rest, he was starting upon a hard ride, with fighting against odds at the other end of the trail.

He had left the card-table heavily in debt, and flushed with wine, but now he showed no weariness, no sign of his ill-luck, and was the cheery, dashing young commander when he addressed Buffalo Bill and told him to "set the pace."

The horses and men had been picked by their lieutenant, and all knew that there was red work before them, for the reason of the scout's coming had flown from man to man.

And Buffalo Bill, in his picturesque border dress, top-boots and sombrero, and mounted upon his favorite horse, Buckskin, a claybank of great power and endurance, seemed not to feel

his desperate ride and run to the fort as he spurred out of the gate upon the trail he had come.

"It will be a fast one, sir, for there is need of it, as you will learn," replied the scout.

And as the lieutenant rode to his side they set off at a steady canter, the troopers following in columns of two and keeping well closed up, with three of Buffalo Bill's scouts bringing up the rear.

One of these men had come along to take the splendid horse of Snow Face back to the fort. The animal was found quietly resting and feeding near where the scout had deserted him.

"Go slow with him, Dick, for he's a wonder," called out Buffalo Bill, as the troopers rode on.

For miles the same steady pace was held, until the scout knew that it was best to call a halt for a rest for fifteen minutes.

The troopers were ordered to walk over the hills, leading their horses for the mile or more of hard trail they had to follow.

Mounting once more, they pushed on at the same steady pace until at dawn the canyon was reached where Buffalo Bill had left his prisoner.

He was still there, nearer dead than alive, it seemed, but soon rallied when relieved of his gag and his bonds were loosened.

"I will go on, sir, while you, after a rest, follow my trail, and if the red-skins have not taken the train then we can take it leisurely," advised the scout.

"All right, Bill; and if they are lying quiet, to await to attack again to-night, then we can wait in hiding and surprise them, for I can send word for Captain Browne to push on and cut them off toward the mountains."

"The very thing, sir; but let me first discover if Captain Kennerley has been able to hold his own."

And mounting his now jaded horse the scout pushed on once more.

As he neared the spot, which he almost dreaded to approach, fearing the worst, he staked Buckskin out in a secure retreat in the foothills and advanced on foot.

A mile had he gone when he came to a clump of timber from which he felt he could see the distant motte where he had left the train.

Drawing off his boots, he began to climb a tree and soon reached the top branches, and after a rest leveled his field-glass.

"Thank God! Bravo, brave Kennerley!"

The words broke fervently from Buffalo Bill's lips, as from his lofty perch, he saw through his field-glass that the train had not been taken!

"The red-skins attacked, that is certain, for I see dead horses scattered about before the corral, and they caught it, too, though they took off their dead and wounded."

"They will wait now until to-night to try some other plan of devilry; but that will be a game in which we can join."

"The flag still flies, yonder, but it is too far off to see what the boys are doing."

"And Snow Face still has his red-skin rope around them."

"I wonder what he thought of the loss of his horse and the brave he left in charge of him?" and Buffalo Bill laughed lightly at his remembrance of the way he had captured the renegade's horse and the buck guard.

Having taken a complete survey of the situation, the scout descended the tree, returned to his horse and soon joined Lieutenant Forrester again and made his report.

A halt was called until night, and one of the scouts, with the prisoner, was sent back to ask Captain Browne to strike for the range trail to head the Indians off in their retreat, and to spare as many cavalry as he could for the lieutenant's attack, which was to be made as soon after dark as they could reach position.

Just at sunset the scout returned with a lieutenant and sixteen cavalrymen from Captain Browne's force, and the march was at once begun, the troopers led to position by Buffalo Bill, just as a series of wild yells told that Snow Face and his braves were again rushing upon the train.

Lieutenant Fred Forrester at once led his men to the charge. They were upon the red-skins like a whirlwind, for they had expected no surprise, and, just in the instant of time, as the defenders of the train had suffered terribly the night before, and could not bring twenty able-bodied men to repel the attack.

With ringing cheers the troopers rushed to their work, their gallant lieutenant urging them on, and, panic-stricken to be attacked in the moment of triumph, the red-skins broke in wild confusion and took to flight, followed by the victorious soldiers.

"Lieutenant Forrester, sir! One moment, for God's sake!" cried a voice, and a soldier dashed out of the corral and seized the rein of the young officer's horse.

"Well, my man, be quick!"

"Captain Kennerley, sir, knew your war-cry to your men, and sends me for you, for—"

"Tell him I will return—"

"He is dying, sir!"

"No, not so bad as that for noble Kennerley!" said the officer, with emotion.

"Yes, sir, he is dying!"

"I will go at once, for my men know their work, and Cody is with them."

Fred Forrester spurred into the corral, threw himself from his horse, and the next moment was kneeling by the side of his friend.

"My poor Kennerley, you are—"

"Dying—don't talk; listen to me!"

"In those saddle-bags are twenty thousand dollars in Government money for the fort paymaster, and five thousand for my niece and ward, Kate Kennerley. Give it to her, and the other to Paymaster Cole—will you, Forrester?"

"Certainly I will, Captain Kennerley."

"You pledge your honor to me, a dying man, to do this?"

"Good God, Kennerley, do you doubt me?"

The eyes growing dim with death were fixed upon the handsome face of the lieutenant, and by the camp-fire light seemed to read his very soul.

Then came the words:

"Fred Forrester, I will banish every atom of ill-will I have felt against you of late and trust you—here is—my—hand—upon—it."

Forrester grasped the hand, while he asked in a voice hoarse with emotion:

"In the name of Heaven, Kennerley, what do you mean by suspicion and ill-will against me?—*—speak, man!*"

But the words, given like a command, reached not the ears of the one addressed.

He was dead, and the soldier was off duty forever!

CHAPTER V.

TO FATHOM A MYSTERY.

"Ah, Cody, I am glad you have come, for I was just about to send the orderly to look you up," and General Carr turned to Buffalo Bill, who just then entered his quarters.

It was two weeks after the relief of the Kennerley train, and there had been stirring scenes in and about Fort Fairview since that night of the double attack.

The renegade chief, Snow Face, and his redskins, had been routed by Lieutenant Forrester, while Major Brown had ambushed them on their retreat and dealt them another severe blow.

The body of Captain Kennerley had been brought to the fort and buried in the little cemetery on the river-bank, where the log chapel was situated, forming a very picturesque and pretty scene.

But a cloud darker than death hung over the fort and its people, and a cloud had fallen upon one of its brightest young officers, which the conversation to follow will reveal.

It was nothing tangible, only dark, damning suspicion, with the belief yet no proof of guilt.

"How can I serve you, general?" asked Buffalo Bill, as he took the seat which the general pointed him to.

"It is about Forrester," said General Carr, with a sigh.

"Poor fellow, he is indeed in trouble, sir," the scout remarked, in a kindly tone.

"I am glad to hear you speak of him with sympathy, Cody, for no one else seems to have a kind word for him."

"I think he is a wronged man, sir, from all I have heard, and which is but little, as I have been away scouting, as you know. I just left the quarters of the lieutenant. He has fever, and looks haggard and wretched, though he does not seem to care for the wound he received."

"I agree with you, Cody, that Forrester is a wronged man, and I am glad to know your opinion is favorable to him, for I wish to send you on a special duty to try and clear the stain from his name."

"I am ready, sir."

"Then let me tell you the facts, so that you will not go blindfolded to work."

"When dying Captain Kennerley intrusted to Forrester a pair of saddle-bags which he told him contained twenty thousand dollars in Government funds for the paymaster, and five thousand dollars which he had belonging to his ward, Miss Kate Kennerley, who has just arrived at the fort to make it her home."

"There were several who heard what passed between Kennerley and Forrester, and they assert that the captain seemed to distrust the lieutenant, hinting that he had cause to do so, and that he exacted from Forrester a pledge to deliver the money in safety."

"Forrester seemed deeply moved and asked for an explanation, when Kennerley fell back dead."

"And left the lieutenant with the money?"

"Yes; for he at once took the saddle-bags, and, mounting, dashed on after his men who were in pursuit of the redskins, as you know."

"Yes, general; but I went with Captain Brown's force, so knew nothing of what happened at the corral of the train."

"Lieutenant Forrester was not seen again for four days after leaving the train that night. He says he was headed off by a band of Indians and chased far off the trail, and, fearing that he might be captured, he hid the saddle-bags in a canyon, and afterward managed to escape and return to the fort."

"Now comes the damning part of the affair

as far as Forrester is concerned, for he reported that on his way he met a Colorado gambler by the name of Gaul, to whom he had once intrusted five thousand dollars, and the man paid it back to him, having been faithful to the trust placed in him."

"Was Gambler Gaul alone, sir?"

"No, he had two comrades with him, and Forrester does not know where they went, more than that the gambler said that he had made enough to retire from business and meant to do so."

"I know the man, sir. He is a strange and remarkable character, as well as a most dangerous one."

"So Forrester says; but with the money which he says Gaul gave him he paid every dollar he owed in the fort, even to returning the pay advanced by the paymaster, so clearing himself of debt."

"Then he obtained permission to go and get the hidden saddle-bags, and insisted upon going alone."

"He was gone two days and came back wounded in the arm, and reporting that he had been held up by masked road-agents and robbed of the saddle-bags and their contents."

"The thought of doubting the honor of Forrester never entered my mind, and I felt the deepest sympathy for him, for, after his gallant attack on the redskins, and saving the train, he deserved all the praise bestowed upon him; but he had hardly gone to his quarters before rumors began to fly about the fort that he had not been robbed, had shot himself to carry out his story, and the money which he had paid his debts with was from the sums intrusted to him by Captain Kennerley."

"In vain did I strive to stem the tide against him, for the officers' wives took it up, the men began to believe it, and there is not an officer in the fort, hardly, who does not believe him guilty."

"I asked Surgeon Powell about his wound, and he said that the coat and arm were powder-burnt, and that the shot had been fired at very close range, hardly a foot off, and could have been the work of Forrester's own hand, yet ye did not believe it."

"Good for Frank Powell, general!" said Buffalo Bill, warmly.

"I see that you are the friend of Forrester, as I am, Cody, and as is Surgeon Powell also; but we are about all, if I make one remarkable exception."

"And who is that, general, if I may ask?"

"Miss Kennerley."

"Ah! the lady who loses the five thousand dollars, sir?"

"Yes; she saw Forrester when he came in. He went to her, wounded and suffering though he was, and made his report, and she said to me that she did not, and would not, for a moment, doubt him, and, as for the money, she was rich and its loss would not inconvenience her."

"She is a splendid girl, Cody, and is going to be a great addition to the fort."

"But now, to the work I have cut out for you?"

"I am ready, sir."

"It is to go on Forrester's trail, find those road-agents, and clear his name of the stain upon it."

"Will you do it?"

"I will leave the fort, sir, within the hour, general, and pledge myself to prove Lieutenant Forrester innocent or guilty," was the firm response.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HEIRESS AND THE OFFICER.

KATE KENNERLEY was an orphan, an heiress and beautiful, and the death of her uncle and guardian left her her own mistress.

The brother of Captain Kennerley, Kate's father, had been an army officer in his younger days, and had fallen, seriously wounded, on a Mexican battle-field, and was reported dead.

Years after he reported for duty and resigned, for he was in ill health, the effects of his wound and long imprisonment.

Then he had returned to Mexico. The next heard of him was a report of his death, and the sending of his daughter to his brother, whom he had made her guardian, bachelor though Captain Kennerley was.

Kate Kennerley had been educated in the best schools in New York, and after graduating had gone West to make her home with her uncle in a frontier fort.

She had been a reigning belle up at the Northern post for the six months she had been there, and then had come to Fort Fairview, where her uncle had been ordered some time before. There she had been placed under the especial care of the wife of Major Denton, the acknowledged leader of the social life of the border post.

Two days before the return of Fred Forrester to report his being attacked by road-agents, with the loss of the money intrusted to him by Captain Kennerley, Miss Kennerley had arrived at the post, and her beauty and lovely character, to set her fortune aside, had at once won all hearts.

Then, too, the deepest sympathy was felt for her in her affliction, for she had dearly loved her uncle, and as her father had also been a soldier, she was looked upon as one who held a claim upon the entire army.

Beautiful she certainly was, with her masses of bronze-hued hair, large, lustrous dark eyes so heavily shaded with lashes as to look like wells of molten fire, and yet so expressive that when aroused from their dreamy languor they seemed to flash like lightning.

Her form was perfect, and her every movement one of natural grace, while her complexion was like tinted marble.

In spite of the tenderness in her eyes, at times there rested upon her mouth an expression almost stern, and even approaching scorn, and if provoked to it, one had reason to dread her stinging repartee, while her self-possession and brilliant conversational powers seemed more to suit a leader of fashionable society than a young girl not yet out of her teens.

Of her past she said nothing, more than that her mother was a Mexican lady and had saved her father from being put to death after his capture.

She left Mexico when she was fifteen, after her father's death, had traveled in Europe for a year with friends of her uncle, and then had passed two years at a fashionable boarding-school in New York, where she had graduated with the first honors of her class. Then she had been told that she had been the heiress to twenty thousand a year, every dollar of which was sent, in quarterly installments of five thousand dollars from Mexico, to her uncle, and it was one of these payments which Lieutenant Frederic Forrester had been robbed of, or had so reported.

Such was the maiden before whom Fred Forrester had to appear, and tell of that loss.

She had already heard, while residing at the fort to the northward, the wild career of the dashing lieutenant, and that he was a reckless card-player and as extravagant as a millionaire.

Upon her arrival at Fort Fairview she found it a most charming frontier home. The garrison was a large one, and the fort, with a prairie stretching far away upon one side, was situated upon a hill overhanging a river, and surrounded by majestic trees.

The scenery was beautiful, the quarters large and comfortable, the band an excellent one, and innumerable out-door sports to be enjoyed, when one tired of dancing and parlor flirtations.

Blood-stained, haggard-faced and pale, dust-covered and hardly able to keep from falling from his saddle, Lieutenant Forrester had returned from his three-days' jaunt alone after the treasure intrusted to his honor by Captain Kennerley.

He staggered from weakness as he dismounted, but at once sought the general's quarters and made his report.

It was a sad one, a bitter one to make, but he did it in a low, terse manner, and told how he had gotten the saddle-bags, and was on his way back to the fort, when he had been ambushed by road-agents, and, in attempting to escape, had been fired upon and wounded, and he showed his blood-stained arm, which he had rudely dressed to check the bleeding.

The saddle-bags and their contents, the money, valuable papers, the watch-chain and ring of Captain Kennerley, had all been taken from him, and he had been allowed to go on his way without being himself robbed, so great was the surprise and delight of the outlaws in their finding of the treasure he carried across his saddle.

"Now go to your quarters, Forrester, and place yourself in Surgeon Powell's hands, for you sadly need help," the general had ordered.

"I must first report her loss to Miss Kennerley, sir, for the sentinel told me she had arrived."

"Yes, poor girl, and she bears her affliction bravely, though really she knows her uncle but slightly. Do you think you had best see her?"

"Yes, sir, before others do, for I fear I may be misunderstood in this matter, general," were the prophetic words of the young officer. He at once went to the quarters of Major Dunbar Denton, where Kate Kennerley made her home.

He sent up his name by the servant, who seemed surprised to see the handsome Adonis of the regiment in such a plight, and, a moment after, the young girl came into the parlor, almost before the officer had had an opportunity to take a hasty glance at himself in the full-length mirror, which always reflected Mrs. Denton's handsome face and form before she considered herself ready to receive guests or attend an entertainment.

The "Adonis" could not congratulate himself upon his appearance, unless he had desired to look like a soldier just out of a fierce encounter, for in such a case he would be a success.

But he turned, and said as he bowed:

"Miss Kennerley, Mr. Forrester."

She held out her hand and grasped his, while she said, softly:

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Forrester, and to express my appreciation of your courage in going to the rescue of my uncle; but you are ill,

and are wounded—be seated, pray, and allow me to—

"No, no; I have a wound, it is true, but I am going to place myself in the surgeon's care, yet could not do so until I had seen you and told you that which it cuts me to the heart to tell, for I have to confess to you, Miss Kennerley, that your uncle intrusted to me a large sum of Government funds, and five thousand dollars for you—"

"So Captain Browne told me, sir, and said that you had hidden it, fearing capture by the Indians, and had gone back to get it."

"Alas! but I have lost it, for I was ambushed by road-agents, wounded as you see, and your money, with the papers of value, your uncle's watch, chain and ring, and the Government funds, were taken from me."

"As far as I am concerned, Lieutenant Forrester, pray give yourself no worry, for I do not half spend the income I have, so shall not miss the sum; but, let me offer you a glass of wine, for you are a very ill man, sir."

"No, thank you; I will go at once to the surgeon; but let me assure you how I feel your kindness, and I pledge you my word that every dollar of yours that was taken from me shall be returned."

"No, no, do not refer to it again, for— Ha! he has fainted from weakness," and Kate Kennerley in vain tried to check the fall of the officer, who suddenly sunk at her feet upon the floor.

Kate Kennerley was made of stern material, so did not faint, but called for help, and when Fred Forrester returned to consciousness he found himself in his own comfortable quarters and Surgeon Frank Powell's handsome, sympathetic face bending over him.

"Powell, I must pull through this," he said, eagerly.

"Yes, but you have had a close call, Fred, for this wound is an ugly one. You have lost much blood and taxed your strength beyond all endurance."

"You have fever, too; but I will not let you die," was the confident assertion of Fort Fairview's popular surgeon.

CHAPTER VII. THE BOY BUGLER.

A PARTY of half a dozen ladies and gentlemen were seated in the moonlight upon the vine-clad piazza of Major Dunbar Denton's quarters, enjoying the beauty of the evening, and also indulging in the gossip of the fort.

The major was there, a man with iron-gray hair and mustache, smoking his cigar in silence, for he was not one to join in the "small talk" of a garrison, though ever genial and a hospitable host.

His wife, lovely in face and graceful in form, with twenty years less to her credit than had her husband, invited two officers and their wives to dine quietly at "Fort Welcome," as the major's home was called, and meet her protégée, Miss Kennerley, who had then been some five weeks at the post.

The conversation had somehow drifted, after the party had adjourned from the dining-room to the piazza, upon Fred Forrester, and a few words were sufficient to show how he was regarded by his brother officers and the ladies of the garrison.

Major Denton had remarked that Surgeon Powell reported Lieutenant Forrester at last out of danger, and the wife of Captain Browne had quickly rejoined:

"It would have been better for him had he died."

"Why do you think so, Mrs. Browne?" quietly asked Kate Kennerley.

"Because of the stain upon his honor, which he can never rid himself of," was the answer.

"I know that nearly every one in the fort seems to regard Mr. Forrester as guilty of—I may as well put it plainly—being a thief, but I do not entertain such an opinion, and the law, I believe, regards a man as innocent until proven guilty."

All looked at Kate Kennerley with surprise at her words, and Mrs. "Captain" Broadbeck said somewhat warmly:

"I certainly regard him as guilty, for his wild career, his gambling debts, paid with money which he says a gambler met him and paid to him, and then his going alone after the Government money and guns, and returning wounded, and reporting how he had been robbed of it, all point to his guilt."

"Yet a court-martial will hardly so consider it, Mrs. Broadbeck, I think," remarked Mrs. Denton.

"Will he not be court-martialed, Major Denton?" asked Mrs. Broadbeck, with the tone of one who hoped that he would be.

"Yes, for Surgeon Powell says that he particularly requests an investigation, madam."

"He knows then, sir, how he is regarded?" asked Kate Kennerley.

"Oh, yes. He is aware that General Carr and myself have been the only ones to visit him, and he demanded of Powell just who had cut him among his old friends."

"He was very ill, and hovered between life and death for a week, but he kept saying:

"I will not die!" and Surgeon Powell says that his nerve alone kept him alive."

"I fear we are not as generous toward our fellows as we might be. I certainly was surprised to hear Chaplain Holdfast say that he had not visited Mr. Forrester, and could not help telling him that he was negligent in his duty," said Kate, while Mrs. Denton added:

"And the shot told, Kate, for what a look he gave you," laughed Mrs. Denton, with whom Chaplain Holdfast was evidently not a favorite.

"I would like to believe Forrester innocent, but, with Mrs. Broadbeck, I can see no proof of his innocence," Captain Broadbeck observed, for, though he was commander of his company his wife was "captain" in his quarters.

"What proof have you of his guilt, captain?" asked Kate Kennerley.

"The odd look of the affair, as it appears, Miss Kennerley."

"Is Mr. Forrester an old friend of yours, Miss Kennerley, that you defend him?" Mrs. Browne asked.

"It seems that his old friends do not defend him. No, Mr. Forrester introduced himself to me when he called to report my loss, and when I, the one who is the sufferer, believe that an officer and a gentleman can hardly have so suddenly turned criminal, I am surprised that those not interested pecuniarily believe him guilty."

This was a home-shot, and all felt that "the heiress" was one to hold her own very cleverly. Major Denton laughed and said:

"Well, we will await the decision of the court-martial and must abide by it."

"I will not, for never shall Fred Forrester cross the threshold of my door—shall he, dear?" and Captain Broadbeck winced, for he had won from Forrester, the night he started to the rescue of Captain Kennerley, four hundred dollars, and had been paid the debt with the very money which it was rumored the lieutenant had robbed Kate Kennerley of, or the Government!

Before reply could be made, the sound of a guitar was heard, and a clear, thrilling tenor voice burst forth in song from over toward the band's quarters.

All listened, and heard distinctly each word as the singer's voice rose and fell with a thrilling ring to it in the words:

"Then mount! then mount, brave gallants all,
And don your helms amain;
Death's couriers, Fame and Honor, call
Us to the field again!
No shrewish tears shall fill our eyes
When the sword-bilt's in our hand;
Heart-whole we'll part, and no whit sigh
For the fairest in the land.
Let piping swain and craven wight
Thus weep and pining cry—
Our business is like men to fight,
And hero-like to die!"

The song ended, and at once came the cry in chorus:

"Who is he?"

The major answered with:

"A boy bugler, who was coming out with Captain Kennerley. He went with me to the northward, and came with the troops two days ago. I told you of him, Mabel," and he addressed his wife.

"Yes, but spoke of his being such a master of the bugle; but, what a voice he has, half womanly, half boyish!"

"Send for him, Dunbar, and have him sing and play for us, please."

The major indulged his lovely wife all in his power. He had not forgotten how, years before, she had been engaged to Captain Kennerley, then a second lieutenant, but, to save her father from financial wreck had married him, for he was a very rich man.

He had found it out afterward, and had regretted that for her sake she had made the sacrifice, and yet she had been a noble, devoted wife to him, while, that her lover had understood her desertion of him, and forgiven her, he had proven by placing his ward under her care.

So he sent his orderly for the Boy Bugler, and they beheld in the moonlight a handsome boy of apparently sixteen, slender and graceful, and dressed in the fatigue uniform of the bugler of a cavalry regiment, when the major commanded.

"Well, Billie Blew, my wife and her friends were delighted with your singing, so I sent for you to request that you give us a closer opportunity to enjoy it."

"I seldom sing in camp, sir, but Lieutenant Forrester sent a request for me to do so, and I did. I have my bugle with me, sir, and will play for you if you wish."

Something in the appearance and manner of the youth impressed all with the belief that he had seen better days; and yet, nothing was known of him, more than that he had been coming West with Captain Kennerley to enlist as a bugler, he said, and Major Denton had at once accepted his services, young as he was, and upon the roll he had been entered as Billie Blew.

Leaning gracefully against a post of the piazza, and in the full moonlight, the Boy Bugler raised his silver bugle to his lips, and never before had such music rung through Fort Fairview—now low and pathetic, then weird and ringing, and again stirring and martial.

The sounds of laughter and voices in the garrison were hushed, and all listened spell-bound to the notes of the bugle that rung far out over the prairie in delicious melody, one instant causing the pulse of the soldier to quicken, and the next to bring tears to eyes of men who had been heroes upon many a red field of battle.

Suddenly the music ceased, and, with a quick salute to his commander, the Boy Bugler glided away, leaving a silence behind him that could be felt.

CHAPTER VIII. TWO SHOTS.

A HORSEMAN was riding over the moonlit prairie, while before him loomed up a range of foot-hills, here and there heavily timbered.

He approached the foot-hills cautiously, like one who knew that death might be lurking in the shadows for him.

As the moonlight fell upon his face, it revealed the handsome features of Buffalo Bill.

He had been some days away from the fort, and had had to find the trail he was to follow as best he could. He had gone to the quarters of the wounded lieutenant, hoping to get some points from him, but Surgeon Powell had told him that his patient was delirious with fever, and could tell him nothing.

The two men, Frank Powell and Buffalo Bill, were fast friends, for many a deadly trail they had followed together, and each owed the saving of his life to the other on more than one occasion.

"Pard Frank, I am going to follow the lieutenant's last trail, when he went alone after that money, so give me what facts you can," said Cody.

"Bill, it is very little that I can tell you, I am sorry to say, more than that Forrester insisted upon going alone, and the result you know."

"He went toward the Lone Range?"

"So he said."

"The Brimstones are on that range, you know."

"Yes, and he said they were the outlaws who robbed him, and that they were masked."

"Frank, do you believe that he was robbed?"

"I do, Bill, against all looks to the contrary."

"So do I, and I am going to find out the truth. Good-by, Doc!" and Cody started upon the blind trail he was to follow to the end.

Perfect trailer though he was, yet even for him it was no easy task for days after, to find the track left by Fred Forrester when he returned to the fort.

But, at last, he did so, and slowly and surely he held to it, though often it was lost, or so faint, it took him hours to be sure he was right.

And so, on that moonlight night he was riding toward the Lone Range.

The trail, at sunset, had led in that direction, and was directed toward a point where he knew a canyon penetrated the hills.

So he did not camp on the trail, as had been his wont, but went on toward the foot-hills, where he was certain to find water and good grass, and also a safer camping place, while, in the morning he could pick up the tracks, doubtless, right in the canyon cutting into the range.

He was well aware that he was on dangerous ground, for roving bands of red-skins might be abroad, while the Lone Range was dreaded as a resort of outlaws who defied the military and settlers, and seemed to stand in no fear of the Indians.

So it was that Buffalo Bill rode slowly and with caution toward the shadows where the canyon entered the range, ready to meet a foe, shot for shot, or turn in flight if odds were greatly against him.

Soon he came in under the shadow of the timber on the hill-tops, and the canyon opened like a yawning gulf before him.

But, suddenly, a flash came and a report, and a bullet struck Buffalo Bill squarely upon the heavy buckle of his revolver-belt and flattened out.

It was indeed a close call, and the blow was a hard one; but the report of the rifle had not died away before Buffalo Bill's gun was at his shoulder as he fired at the spot from whence the flash had come.

A deep moan answered his shot.

Hardly had the wary scout fired when he slipped from his saddle, gave his horse a slap that sent him back upon the trail, while he took to cover in the bushes near.

All was the work of an instant and the horse, thoroughly trained, kept on until a whistle from his master brought him to a halt.

Then a dead silence followed of a minute or more, but the scout did not move.

A deep groan came from the rocks, from whence the shot had been fired, but Bill still kept his position.

Next came the words:

"Oh, God! have mercy upon me!"

No response or movement from the wary scout.

"I am dying, dying, here and alone, only the man I just shot near me. Heaven pardon my sinful life! God have mercy upon me!"

If the man was feigning he played his part well, but the scout still kept silent and stirred

not from the thicket, while from the rocks, not thirty feet away again came the voice in tones of deep anguish:

"Can there be pardon for one like me?"

Then the scout spoke:

"Pard, are you hard hit?"

"Ha! who speaks?" and the voice rung out almost joyfully from behind the rocks.

"One whom men call Buffalo Bill," came the scout's answer from his cover.

"Buffalo Bill! Thank God I did not kill you; but I aimed true."

"You did, for your bullet flattened upon my belt-buckle. Who are you?"

"I am ashamed to tell you."

"And why?"

"Because you saved my neck from the rope once, and I pledged you my word I would lead a different life."

"I have saved the necks of a dozen men from the rope, and regretted it afterward."

"Do you remember Brick Benson?"

"Ah! my shadow, as men called you."

"Yes, I am Brick Benson."

Without hesitation Cody left his cover and walked to the spot where lay the man whom he had called his shadow.

There, on the rocks, under the shadows of the overhanging trees lay a man at full length. That he was dying the scout saw the moment he bent over him, for his bullet had entered his breast.

"Brick Benson, I am sorry that you have to die by my hand; but you meant to kill me, and I did not, of course, know you, nor do I believe you knew who I was."

"Upon my honor I did not, Buffalo Bill—my honor—bah! an outlaw's honor!" and the last words were uttered in a tone of bitterness that seemed to touch the other deeply, for he said:

"Well, let me see if it is as bad as it looks; maybe I can help you."

"No, I've got my death-wound, Bill."

"I'll carry you to the hillside yonder, where there is soft grass, and in the moonlight I can see to dress your wound."

"Gently, Bill, gently!" said the self-confessed outlaw, as the scout raised him in his strong arms and carried him to a grassy bank a few yards distant, and upon which the moonlight streamed with all its brightness.

Two sharp whistles brought his horse to the spot, and the scout asked:

"Any more of your band near, Benson?"

"No, I am alone, and my horse is hitched back on the trail there," and he added, with a groan of anguish: "Quick, Bill, remove my mask, and let me talk to you, for I have a confession to make!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCOUT'S "SHADOW."

BUFFALO BILL remembered Brick Benson as a former sergeant in the army, who, having killed a fellow-soldier over a game of cards, had been forced to fly for his life.

There were palliating circumstances in the case, but Benson had not dared stand a court-martial, so had deserted and gone to the mines.

On one occasion he had rendered the scout a favor, coming to his aid when a gang of roughs meant to attack him. Bill had then given him warning that his presence in the mines was known, and that he was to be arrested, tried for murder and desertion, and hanging would surely follow.

The man had pledged the scout to lead a different life, and had decamped in time to save his neck, and they had not met again until the night when each sat at the other on the trail.

In the army the sergeant had often been taken for the scout, for in face and form they were strangely alike, and after his desertion, having allowed his hair to grow long, the ex-soldier bore a startling resemblance to Buffalo Bill, and had been often called his "Shadow."

The scout made the wounded man as comfortable as he could, with his blankets, and opening his hunting-shirt, examined his wound with the air of one who understood from long experience a good deal about such things.

"Benson, this wound is fatal, I am sorry to say."

"I know it, Bill, for when you draw trigger it is to kill."

"I did not see you, but fired at your flash."

"I saw you far out on the prairie, so ambushed you and shot to kill; but, thank Heaven, I did not; but, Bill?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that I broke my word to you?"

"You said as much."

"Yes, I went wrong again; but I did not intend to. The truth is, I took sides with a man one night in the Colorado camps, who had half a dozen upon him, and saved his life. He asked me what I was doing for a living, and I could tell him only that I was card-playing."

"Then he told me to come with him and he'd give me a chance to pile up gold."

"Well, Bill, I went, and, the truth is, he was known in the camps as Gambler Gaul, and in secret he is none other than Brimstone, the leader of the Brimstone Brotherhood."

"Aha!" and Buffalo Bill gave a low whistle.

"I am talking now, Bill, to save you, for I know these men mean to have your life, so beware of Gambler Gaul in the camps, and Captain Brimstone on the trail."

"And you are a member of his band?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been?"

"Six months."

"Benson?"

"Yes, Bill."

"You are a dying man."

"I know it well."

"You now see how wicked has been the life you have led, and more, you feel that you wish to atone for the past."

"Yes, Bill, I do."

"Now, this Brimstone Brotherhood was formed lately for one purpose, and that is to rob and kill."

"Yes, Bill."

"The man who is its captain is a card-sharp, a murderer, and a thief."

"I know it well."

"He breaks the laws of God and man, and the innocent suffer for his crimes."

"Yes."

"Now I am determined to hunt him down, and if you wish to atone for the past, tell me all that you can to help me do so."

"I will, for he and the whole outfit should hang; but, Bill, I want you to do something for me."

"Yes."

"I have in a belt with me some three thousand dollars, and, though it is not honest money, the one I send it to will not know that."

"I ran away from home, and entered the army under an assumed name, so my old mother does not know me as a murderer and deserter."

"She is poor, and I have a sister I love, though I fear she, like myself, has inherited the devil in our father's nature, and may yet cause our poor mother much trouble and sorrow."

"I don't wish mother to know I was wicked, but you write to her and send her my belt of money, telling her I was mining, and trying to get rich, but died suddenly, and left my little fortune to her. Will you do this, Bill, for me?"

"Gladly; so tell me your mother's name and address, and I will write her word as soon as I return to the fort, and she shall hear only good of you from me."

"God bless you, Bill; you will find her name and address in my money-belt. Her name is Mrs. Benson Roberts, of Newburg, on the Hudson, for I was named after my father, who I regret to confess was a bad man; and, Bill, he was hanged for murder, so you see I am a worthy son, for I doubtless inherit my wicked propensities."

"Is this all I can do for you, pard?" asked Bill, his sympathy for the man aroused by his sad life and end.

"Yes, all, and it is, oh, so much! but you said you wished to ask me about the Brimstones?"

"Yes, I wish to learn all I can regarding them."

"Well, ask and I will answer, but don't delay, for I am bleeding to death internally."

Thus urged Buffalo Bill said:

"The band has been organized about two months, has it not?"

"Bill, Captain Brimstone has been picking out his men and trying them for some time; but he is to organize them a month from to-day."

"There is not a man there who knows him as Gambler Gaul, for he has written to the men he picked out to meet at certain places, and to meet in masks, so that I do not believe one man is known to the other."

"We have struck the coaches on the Overland a couple of times, and made several raids on the settlers; but a week from to-day we are to meet to thoroughly organize, but I won't be there, Bill."

"No, but I'll be there to represent you!" was the quiet response.

"Bill, for God's sake, don't do it!"

"Oh, yes, for I'll go masked, and play Brick Benson;—like himself, play double; but now let me ask you if your men met on the prairie some time ago, a lieutenant from the fort and robbed him?"

"I never heard of it, Bill."

"Have some of your men been raiding together in bands of fours and fives?"

"No, only in force and with the chief. I know him, as he does me, and he sent me on a trip to Snow Face's village."

"Ah! Is the renegade, Snow Face, Brimstone's ally?"

"Yes, for I have a letter for him."

"I see, and he is to give Snow Face a share in his plunder, if he will give him leave to retreat into his country, if pressed, and protect him?"

"About that, Bill, I guess; but the letter tells."

"And where is Snow Face?"

"In his mountain stronghold."

"And Brimstone?"

"He has gone to the mines."

"But will be back to the rendezvous a month from to-day?"

"Yes, Bill, a month or five weeks, for that was the time set."

"How many men has he picked out?"

"Twenty-four, with me, and he makes twenty-five."

The moonlight shone full upon the face of Buffalo Bill, and revealed there some stern, daring resolve, and the dying outlaw read it, for he said:

"Heaven protect you, Buffalo Bill, in the desperate game you are going to play."

CHAPTER X.

THE SCOUT'S RESOLVE.

AS the hours passed on, the voice of the deserter, at first strong, and with a manly ring to it, at last grew fainter and fainter, until the words came in a whisper:

"Give me your hand, Buffalo Bill."

Buffalo Bill grasped the hand of the dying outlaw, and thus sat in the moonlight until the lamp of life flickered out, and Death's seal was indelibly set upon the upturned face.

The last words uttered, in the faintest of whispers, which came to the listening ears of the scout, were:

"God bless you, Buffalo Bill!"

A prayer from an outlaw's lips for the man who had taken his life!

Upon the broad breast the scout crossed the hands, and then arose to prepare to give him decent burial.

His horse was feeding near. From his saddle he took a hatchet which he never went without, and seeking a secluded spot near, began to dig a grave.

It was an hour's work, but at last the grave was completed, and going after the horse of the outlaw, he led him to the spot, and took from his saddle one of the blankets strapped there.

He then removed from the body the belt of money, weapons, the hunting-shirt and hat, and laid them to one side with the black mask.

Wrapping the form in the blanket, he placed it in the grave, which he at once filled in, and over which he fastened down several logs, that the wolves should not tear up the remains.

Mounting his horse and leading the animal of the dead outlaw, and which he saw was a splendid beast, he rode away along the base of the range for several miles when he came to another canyon, into which he turned.

This he traversed for a mile, until it spread out into half a score of other canyons, one of which, after some hesitation, he entered.

A short ride brought him to where it narrowed into a mere chasm, and beyond spread out into what was a large basin, well grassed and watered, and with precipitous sides all around it.

Dismounting, the scout hitched the animal of the dead outlaw, and leaving his own steed to feed at will, he went to work with his hatchet upon some small saplings, and in an hour's time had erected a barrier across the chasm-like entrance to the basin.

Then, as though well acquainted with his surroundings, he turned his two horses loose, and throwing himself upon his blankets sunk to sleep just as the moon disappeared behind the treetops.

The sun had risen when he awoke, and springing to his feet he set about work like one who had a duty to perform.

He cooked a good breakfast, for he went well supplied with provisions, and then hid the saddle and bridle of the outlaw among the rocks, and set the horse free to feed at will in the basin, and where he could also get water.

Mounting his own horse, after having made the barrier secure, he rode away at a swift canter.

All day long he spared neither his horse nor himself, and soon after nightfall came within view of the lights of the fort.

He answered the challenge of the sentinel promptly, and five minutes after was ushered by the orderly into the presence of General Carr.

"You are back soon, Cody, and I hope with good news," said the general, pleasantly, as he motioned the scout to a seat, for he saw that he looked tagged as from a hard ride.

"I have news, general, and I will tell you what it is at once, for I wish to be off again to-night."

"It is important, then?"

"Yes, sir, for I have plenty to do; but let me say that, after considerable difficulty, I found Lieutenant Forrester's trail, and, though losing it, time and again, tracked him to a canyon in the Lone Range, or rather toward it, until night, when I knew from its course, that it made for a canyon that entered the ridge from the prairie."

"As I entered the canyon I was fired upon from an ambush, and here is the bullet, flat as half a dollar. My belt-buckle caught it and thus saved my life."

"I returned the fire, at the flash, and got my man. He happened to be the Deserter Sergeant you had on your rolls as Robert Benson, and who was known as Brick Benson in the mines."

"You killed him?"

"Yes, sir, but he lived for a couple of hours after."

"Well, he merited his fate, Cody."

"He was not such a bad fellow, general, after all, for here is his belt of money, three thousand dollars, which I am to send to his mother, along with some papers and other things, and he gave me information which I will find most useful in running down the Brimstone Brotherhood!"

"Ah! he was one of that gang, then?"

"Yes, sir," and Buffalo Bill went on to tell just what information he had gotten from the dying outlaw, and continued: "Now, general, here is the letter to Snow Face, the Renegade. I intend to open and read it, but will be careful not to let him suspect it has been tampered with."

"But, why?"

"Because I intend to carry it to him, sir, myself!"

"Buffalo Bill, have you lost your mind?"

"No, sir, but see how easy it is, for you know how much Benson resembled me, and, as I go with this letter to Snow Face, I of course go as the Deserter Sergeant, and can ascertain all about the renegade's force and stronghold."

"I have some of the sergeant's outfit, his weapons with his name on them, and his horse I left barred up in a canyon on the Lone Range until I return."

"Do you see, general?"

"Oh, yes, I see, but I am afraid it will be the last time I will see you, Cody!"

"Oh, no, sir, for I will pull through without a hitch, as I must do, because I have another plot to carry out."

"And this other plot, Cody?"

"I told you, sir, that the Deserter Sergeant said the Brimstone Brotherhood was to meet at a certain rendezvous within a month."

"Yes, and you know the place?"

"I do, sir."

"Then I can send a force there, and—"

"No, general, for as they all come by different trails, the troops would be seen, and that would spoil all."

"They are masked, you know, and so I shall again play the part of the Deserter Sergeant, and—"

"Buffalo Bill, are you meditating suicide?" gravely asked the general.

"No, sir, I hadn't thought of it."

"Are you tired of life?"

"On the contrary, general, I am very fond of it, and hope to keep on the trail for many a long year yet."

"But you are foolish enough to place yourself among these outlaws?"

"Oh, I shall enlist, general, and become a Brimstone in good standing," laughed the scout.

"It will be useless to urge against it, for I see you are set upon carrying out your plot, which, I admit, if successful, will be the means of bringing the Brimstone Brotherhood to the rope; but, about Lieutenant Forrester?"

"The deserter knew nothing about him, or his having been robbed."

"I am sorry, for I was in hopes his word of their having robbed him would clear his name."

"So was I, sir; but, when I join the Brotherhood band I can learn the truth."

"Yes, if you ever get back to tell it."

"I think I will, sir."

"Well, do as you deem best. When do you start?"

"I will take a few hours' rest, sir, and leave by daylight."

"Fortune favor you!" and the general wrung the hand of the scout as he took his departure, to go upon the perilous duty which he had pledged himself to accomplish.

Going to Surgeon Powell's quarters he told him of his intention, and was again urged not to take such deadly risks; but, firm in his resolve, just at dawn he rode away from Fort Fairview on the trail that would lead him to the village of Snow Face, the renegade chief of the Sioux.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE DEN OF LIONS.

BUFFALO BILL had decided upon a bold plan of action, one that seemed really a desperate adventure, when it is recalled that he had decided to play the part of the deserter sergeant and not only seek the mountain village of the renegade white chief of the Sioux, but also pretend to be a member of the Brimstone Brotherhood.

He was mounted upon the horse which had belonged to Snow Face, the White Chief, and whose great speed and powers of endurance he had so thoroughly tested.

The horse had been taken back to the fort by one of Cody's scouts, and of course was looked upon as his, Buffalo Bill's, property.

He had had excellent care and a good rest, so was as ready for service as ever, and as he expected to give him another rest the scout did not spare him, but pushed him along toward the Lone Range where he had left the deserter's horse in hiding.

He had much to do and a long ride. To reach the village of Snow Face and then get to the rendezvous would take a couple of weeks.

When he went to meet the Brimstone Brother-

hood at the time for the gathering for the organization the scout intended to be thoroughly acquainted with the country surrounding.

It was after nightfall when he rode into the range. Ever cautious, he dismounted and approached the canyon on foot.

He crept up to the barrier and found it just as he had left it over thirty hours before.

Leaping over the barrier, there was the deserter's horse feeding not far away in the basin. It greeted him with a low neigh, as though fond of company.

Returning for his own horse, he led him into the basin and turned him loose, after which he prepared supper and sought the rest he so much needed.

The sun was rising when he awoke. He soon had his breakfast, then he got the bundle, saddle and bridle of the deserter, and began to metamorphose himself into that personage.

His own saddle, bridle and weapons were hidden, and now, remarkably like the man he had slain, he mounted the outlaw's horse and rode out of the canyon, closing the barrier securely and leaving Renegade, as he had named the animal of Snow Face, behind him.

His way lay toward the mountains, where Snow Face ruled as chief of the Sioux village.

He well comprehended the dangers he had to face, and yet did not hesitate for a moment.

Snow Face was known to be merciless to his own people, against whom he seemed to have a hatred most intense.

It was said that he had been a miner who, having murdered a claim-holder and appropriated his claim, was forced to fly for his life and had sought a refuge among the Indians.

But, this was hearsay only, and really nothing was known of the renegade's antecedents.

To Buffalo Bill, as well as to all others, he was a mystery; but the scout felt that he had now a fair chance to fathom the mystery regarding the white man who warred with another race against his own.

The deserter had told Buffalo Bill that he had once met Snow Face, but could tell him nothing regarding him, so the renegade chief was prepared to recall the man who was his messenger from Gambler Gaul—or rather, Captain Brimstone.

The latter was another unfathomable border character. He was a man of thirty-five, had spent years on the border, in the forts, at the posts and in the mining-camps, and his means of living were simply by cards.

He had wonderful nerve—which, in the frontier, is characterized as having *gall*; hence his name.

If he acknowledged any other name than that of Gambler Gaul nobody knew what it was.

Successful he had always been as a gambler; but no one then lived who had accused him of being a card-sharp and cheat.

He had seemed to like life at the forts, and, as courtly as a Chesterfield, with a superior education, a voice that would have commanded a good salary as an opera-singer, he was a favorite with officers and men.

Nothing had been alleged against him, more than that he had been a "gambler by profession," and he made no secret of that fact.

He had had several "affairs," and the other man was invariably the one to go under.

Gambler Gaul, at the posts, was called "Mr. Gaul" by courtesy, and the officers' families never failed to return his polite salute, for he bowed to every lady with courtly grace, and the children all greatly admired him.

He was a superb horseman, a dead shot, dressed elegantly, though gorgeously, and was a decided "character," only found on the border.

From post to post he drifted, from mining-camp to settlement, so that his disappearance was not looked upon with suspicion.

And now the charge had been made by the deserter sergeant that Gambler Gaul had turned road-agent secretly—was, in truth, none other than Captain Brimstone, the chief of the new Overland raiders.

This secret Buffalo Bill had told in confidence to General Carr, and, as he now rode along, he took out the letter intrusted to the deserter by Gambler Gaul for Snow Face.

He had skillfully opened the envelope when at headquarters, so that he could seal it again and have it appear intact.

That letter Buffalo Bill read as he rode along. It ran as follows:

"MOUNTAIN RETREAT,

"June 10th, 18—.

"FRIEND SNOW FACE:—

"You will recall a pledge you once made to me to hold yourself at my service when I should need you, for whatever demand I should deem fit to make."

"You pledged yourself to this in return for my having saved you from the tender mercies of the hangman."

"Since then we have drifted apart, to meet again, years after, upon the border. You have become a renegade white, and chief of the Sioux, while I have done well as a gambler, and have saved up a snug little fortune."

"But, I wish more; I wish to place myself beyond the risk of getting poor, and so I have decided to make a bold strike for fortune, and, in a year, hope to get all I need."

"My stroke is to rob the Overland coaches and

mule trains of the gold sent East, and I have organized a band to do so."

"As a gambler about the forts and mines, I can learn of the movements of these treasures, and shall strike them with my band, which I call, after my old nickname of Brimstone, viz.: the Brimstone Brotherhood."

"Now we will be hunted hard, and probably shall often have to fly to your country for protection. My demand of you now is simply to protect us."

"Instruct your braves to respect and befriend my men."

"We are twenty-five, all told. All are masked, and so are even unknown to each other. I know every man of them, but am unknown to any and all of the band."

"Our insignia is a red torch-holder with a blue flame, painted upon our masks, and a number."

"I shall expect favorable reply by bearer, who is true as steel to me, and who is a deserter from the army."

"When I receive your reply, I will some day come with my command to get acquainted with you and your braves. Needless to say that your own share of booty which I will bring along will be liberal."

Yours,

"CAPTAIN BRIMSTONE."

"Yes, you can trust the bearer—to hang you," muttered Buffalo Bill, who smiled grimly as he resealed the letter and rode on his way.

Several days after, the Sioux braves doing outpost duty at their village were surprised to see a white man riding toward their camp; but he was not, apparently, an enemy, for he came on with hands up, the palms turned toward them, and asked to be taken to Snow Face, their chief, speaking the Sioux tongue with perfect fluency.

So the stranger was taken into the village, and Buffalo Bill found himself face to face with Snow Face, the White Chief of the Sioux. He had entered the lion's den!

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERIOUS PAIR.

"A STRONGHOLD, indeed," said Buffalo Bill, as he was led toward the red-skin village and noted its strength as a retreat.

There were many Indians in the tribe who knew Buffalo Bill well, and he was their bitter foe, as they were his; but this stranger, though he looked like the great scout, yet did not altogether appear to be the man they so dreaded.

At any rate, the visitor was in their power. If he did not give good reason for his coming, he was doomed, that was certain.

The first thing that struck the scout as odd, in the Indian village, was a large log cabin, well-built and comfortably arranged.

It stood on a hill overlooking the village, and from the piazza, for there was one, a view could be had of the surrounding mountains, the valley and the winding river, here and there hidden by heavy timber.

The tepees of the Indians were scattered about in half a dozen groups, or villages, each one being near some pass in the mountain range, the better to guard the hill-locked valley.

Each village was under a chief, with Snow Face, the renegade, as the head medicine-man and mighty chief.

Buffalo Bill took in these points at a glance, as also he did that, if the village was attacked at any one, or more, of the passes, the braves could make a stand from the villages nearest, while the women, children, cattle and plunder could retreat through the pass back of the chief's cabin into the mountain fastness, which they could hold against a large army.

As the daring scout, with four braves accompanying him, approached the cabin, he was surprised to see that it was furnished as well as were the quarters of any officer at the fort.

A hammock swung upon the piazza, and a man's form reclined in it, while the scout was almost startled to discover a young and beautiful woman seated in an easy-chair near, reading a novel.

She spoke to the man in the hammock, as the red-skins drew near with the message-bearer. He at once arose, and gazed fixedly upon the man who had ventured into his retreat.

Buffalo Bill eyed him curiously as he rode up, for he had often heard of the white renegade, and longed to meet him under equal terms upon the prairie.

He saw a man with slender but athletic form, broad-shouldered, and dressed in buckskin hunting-shirt and leggings.

He wore cavalry boots, drawn over his buckskin leggings, and a broad-brimmed sombrero was on a chair near, in the band of which were several large eagle-feathers, denoting his rank as chief.

His hair was intensely black, curling, and hung down his back almost to his waist, but his face was the strangest, for his complexion was like marble, showing at once why the Indians had called him Snow Face, as they invariably name one from some peculiarity.

His eyes were a deep blue, and every feature was strongly marked, but appeared, with the white skin, as if cut out of Parian marble.

The lashes of the eyes were very long, giving to the countenance an expression of melancholy. But the face was one to fear and to distrust; the thin lips were indicative of a cruel nature, and the white teeth showing when he smiled gave an

expression of a man at once sinister and treacherous.

And the woman?

She was also dressed in buckskin, embroidered with colored porcupine quills, beads, and fringed with various-hued feathers.

Her form was elegant. Her small feet were incased in beaded moccasins, while she, too, wore a sombrero of grayish hue, trimmed with feathers.

She had blue eyes, but they were dark blue. Her hair was of a golden red and worn in massive braids down her back, falling below her waist.

Her face was bronzed, for, unlike the man's alabaster-like complexion, her skin was one to tan; but the rich hue of health shone through it.

Beautiful she was, and yet a dangerous beauty was it; a Cleopatra in the Western wilds.

She could scarcely have been over twenty-four or five years of age, and certainly, not being, or appearing to be, a captive, she seemed singularly out of place there in that Indian village.

To see her there was a surprise to Buffalo Bill, who had never heard of her before, or suspected her presence among the Sioux, who, if she had long been among them had kept their secret well.

"I have seen the famous scout, Buffalo Bill, several times, Irma, and I believe that yonder man is he," said the chief, as the Indians drew nearer with the white horseman.

"Then Buffalo Bill is a prisoner to our braves, and his doom is sealed," was the woman's response.

"No, for, were he a prisoner, my braves would have him bound. He is doubtless sent from the fort to treat with me; but I shall show my enemies that I am not to be trifled with; I shall put their messenger to death!" and the blue eyes of the speaker grew almost black with anger, though the rest of his face was emotionless.

"What do my warriors bring a pale-face foe to my tepee for?" he called out sternly, as the party drew near the cabin.

Before a warrior could reply, Buffalo Bill, who, of course, understood what the white chief had said, spoke up:

"I am the friend, not the foe of the Snow Face. I come from one who has sent a letter to him."

"You are Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts under General Carr?"

The scout laughed and replied:

"I'll be killed yet from my resemblance to that man Cody; but here, chief, this letter will explain; for it is from your friend, Captain Brimstone."

"I have heard of such a man, chief of a band of road-agents, but I do not know him."

"His letter will prove to the contrary, for he said you would know his writing."

The chief had taken the letter and glanced at the address when something very like a startled cry broke from his lips and then came the muttered words, uttered in a voice now hoarse and quivering:

"Good God! It is from Edmund Allyn."

And, as he uttered the name, the woman, too, gave a startled cry and her face rivaled the man's in whiteness, so quickly did it turn to the hue of death.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DANGEROUS SECRET.

THE quick eyes of Buffalo Bill had noted at once the emotion which the letter had caused, not only in the man, but in the woman.

It told him that both knew the man Snow Face had called Edmund Allyn, and had come to fear him, too.

As Captain Brimstone, chief of the Brimstone Brotherhood, they did not appear either to know him or dread him, but the handwriting had been a surprise and caused a seemingly painful recognition of one they dreaded, from some cause.

But, Buffalo Bill was too shrewd to show what he had observed, and his eyes wandered about as though interested in his surroundings, apparently unheeding the chief and the woman.

The letter was addressed to:

"SNOW FACE,

"The White Chief of the Sioux."

"Delivered by the Deserter Sergeant."

As Buffalo Bill had conned the contents of the epistle, he was forearmed. He knew that Snow Face owed to Captain Brimstone his escape from the gallows, at some time in the past, and also held his vow to render him a service when he, Brimstone, should demand it of him. The demand had now come, and it came like a shock, the scout saw.

But Snow Face quickly rallied, after he had glanced over the contents of the letter, which he did with his face turned away, as though to get a better light upon it.

Pale and anxious-faced, the woman sat gazing at the man as he read, wondering, hoping, dreading, it seemed, all in one moment of suspense.

When Snow Face again turned to the scout, his face was placid once more, and he said pleasantly:

"You are the deserter sergeant, sir?"

The scout bowed and replied:

"Brick Benson, sir, at your service."

"Dismount, please, and be seated, while we talk together."

"Irma, this is Sergeant Benson."

The woman bowed, as did the scout, but it was clear that her interest lay more in the letter, the contents of which she yet knew nothing of, than in the messenger.

"What a striking likeness you are, sir, to the scout, Buffalo Bill!"

"Yes, I am said to be the very image of him," was the cool reply, and a very truthful one, too.

"I have heard of you, sergeant, for I keep posted about affairs along the frontier forts, though I dwell among the red-skins here, as you see, for reasons I need not make known."

The Snow Face then turned and dismissed the Indians who had brought the scout to his cabin, after which he continued:

"As you said, sir, this letter is from a friend, one I knew well in the past; may I ask if you know its contents?"

"Only that Captain Brimstone seeks to make you his ally, chief, so that, if driven hard by the settlers and military, he may have a safe retreat into your country, instead of a red-skin foe to fight."

"That is about it, and I will gladly be the ally of Edmund Al—I mean, of Captain Brimstone, and I will so write to him by you—that is, if you carry the letter back."

There was a world of meaning in the way these last words were uttered; their significance was startling to the scout; but Cody always has perfect command of his nerves; so he replied, without the change of a muscle of his face:

"Yes; I was to bring a letter back from you, Captain Brimstone said."

Snow Face made no reply, but passed the letter over to the woman to read, watching her face the while.

She handed it back to him in silence, and there seemed to be a certain telegraphy between them with their eyes which Buffalo Bill could not understand.

Then the chief turned to the scout and asked:

"Have you known my esteemed friend, Brimstone, long?"

There appeared to be something of a sneer in the tone and words, but the scout pretended not to see it. He felt that he was in for it, live or die, and answered, in his indifferent way:

"Yes, quite a while. I owe my life to him, in fact."

"As I do; but that is in the past. The present and the future are enough for me. Did he ever speak to you of me?"

"No more than to tell me to deliver that letter to you and that you were an old friend."

"Ah! but did he speak of any one else?"

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Did he hint that there was any one here with me in the Sioux village?"

"Only your red-skins."

"I see; but he did not refer to the fact that you might find here a—a—my wife, in fact?"

"No, chief; and I confess to a surprise in finding a lady here, for I never heard that there was more than one white person among the Sioux, and that yourself."

"No, we have kept the secret of my wife's being here well, and we intend to."

"You see, I am a renegade, and am, therefore, at war with my people, from whom expecting no mercy I show none to; but there is no reason that this lady should suffer for my sins, and have it said that there was a fair renegade here, also."

"You understand, Mr. Benson?"

The scout did not understand, for the renegade had not made his motives very clear; but it appeared to him more polite to say so, and something told him that it was safer by far; thereupon he responded:

"Oh, yes, chief; I understand."

"My red-skins are pledged to silence, and you know, if you understand Indian nature, that they are not given to talking; even the old squaws are not gossips."

"Then, we take no prisoners, or, rather, if we do, they never escape, so no one can reveal our secrets. With outside Indians we are unfriendly and consequently have no visitors, white or red."

"So you see, Mr. Benson, that you have placed yourself in a very unfortunate situation."

Not a feature of the scout's face changed as he asked:

"In what respect, chief?"

"You know our secret!"

"If you mean that you have your wife here in the Indian village with you, yes."

"And no man who has discovered the secret is now alive."

"But they were your foes!"

"True; but, friends are not always to be trusted."

"I came from your friend, Captain Brimstone."

"Yes, and it would be so easy for me to write Captain Brimstone a letter, telling him that I become his ally with great pleasure, but regret

to state that you, his esteemed messenger, met with a sad and fearful death, through your horse slipping on a trail around a precipice and, plunging over it, dashed you to destruction on the rocks below; so, under these painful circumstances, I had to send one of my trusted warriors with the letter which you were the bearer of when you met with your accident."

"Do you see, my dear Pard Benson?"

"Yes, I see," returned Buffalo Bill, and he felt a chill creeping over him at this declared purpose of the chief, which he now realized was to kill him and thus keep his secret about the beautiful white woman in the Sioux village from becoming known.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER A CLOUD.

WHITE-FACED, haggard, a wreck almost of his former self, Lieutenant Fred Forrester arose from his bed, a few days after the departure of Buffalo Bill, and presented himself before the court-martial which was to fasten guilt upon him, or remove from his name the stain of dishonor.

Surgeon Frank Powell had pulled him through, bringing him back to life from the very threshold of the Shadow Land.

And only his skill and devoted nursing had accomplished it, added to the firm resolve of his patient to fight death to the end.

The manful struggle of surgeon and patient had triumphed, and the seal of eternal silence was not placed upon the lips of Fred Forrester.

But the bright face of the young officer his cheery laugh and dashing manner were a gone. He looked years older, and about him there was a frigid dignity that not one of his comrades could break down.

He was marked in his courtesy to General Carr and to Major Denton, while his eyes would light up with a pleasant smile when Surgeon Powell approached him.

He had heard all, he knew all. He was well aware that his having paid his debts from money which he had said Gambler Gaul owed him and had paid him was doubted, and that the suspicion was against him that the money had been a part of that which had been intrusted to him by Captain Kennerley.

He knew that officers of other regiments had cast out hints that he had hidden the money and had kept it for his own use.

Under such a cloud, he had demanded investigation, and was to appear before the court-martial, which was to be held in the fort in a few days.

Of this court-martial Major Denton was judge-advocate, and his was the only friendly face that Fred Forrester saw in the number who held his future life in their hands.

To all the officers in the fort he maintained a frigid manner, saluting his superiors, and speaking only when addressed.

He appeared before the tribunal calm, white-faced and stern. He told his story, and it was a simple one:

He had left the card-table to go to the relief of Captain Kennerley, and he had given I. O. U.'s for over four thousand dollars.

He had lived extravagantly, but his fortune at cards had often helped him out, and whenever a winner he had paid every debt he owed.

He had a mania for gambling, which he could not resist, inherited, he supposed, from his father, a Mississippi planter, who had played away his fortune at the card-table.

He had no desire to condone his faults; he had no virtues to parade; but as a soldier he had tried to do his duty.

He had ridden hard to save the Kennerley party, and when the red-skins were in full flight, had been following, when called to the side of the dying officer.

Captain Kennerley had shown a distrust of him, but why he did not know.

His pledge had been given to deliver the money and papers, and before he could ask for an explanation of the captain's doubt the latter had fallen back, dead.

Then he had taken from him his watch, chain, sleeve-buttons and ring, with his purse and some papers, placed them in the saddle-bags, which were locked, but the key was found in the captain's pocket.

Following after his victorious men, now several miles away in pursuit of the Indians, he had dashed upon a still stronger band and was forced to fly.

His horse was lame, and, fearing he might be taken, he decided to hide the saddle-bags, hoping, if captured, he would be able to send a note in cipher to the general where to find the treasure.

But after hiding the property intrusted to him he had escaped, and the next day had met Gambler Gaul upon the prairie. The gambler had paid him a debt of five thousand dollars he owed him, and returning to the fort he had asked leave to go back after the treasure of Captain Kennerley, which he had hidden in the hills.

He told the story about it and started alone, for he saw that suspicion was upon him from his having paid his debts with the money received from Gambler Gaul.

Finding the saddle-bags where he had left

them, he was returning with a light heart, when he was ambushed and captured by half a dozen road-agents.

In their delight at finding so large a treasure, they had allowed him to depart without robbing him of his own money and valuables.

Such was the story, told in a clear voice and with an eye that met defiantly every glance turned upon him.

He asked no mercy, only justice such as a man of honor had a right to expect, and so he submitted his case.

It was then shown that scouts sent all along the frontier to find Gambler Gaul had returned without him, one only saying that the scout had left the border, it was said.

So no proof could be had from him that he had paid Lieutenant Forrester the money the officer had stated he received from him.

Still, what was to be done more than to accept the report of the young officer?

He had never been known to swerve from the truth or his duty, and his sense of honor was unquestionably high, in spite of his wild life.

So the court-martial, after a few hours of delay, decided that "Lieutenant Frederic Forrester, of the —th Cavalry, was not guilty of the charges specified."

By military law he stood cleared of dishonor; but morally he appeared to be guilty, for hardly any one agreed with the verdict.

"He is guilty," was the almost universal verdict of officers, their families and the settlers; and he could count his friends upon the fingers of one hand.

But the men, especially of his own regiment, believed in him, and were markedly polite and courteous toward him.

The general, Surgeon Powell and Major Denton, among his former intimates, still believed in him, and Mrs. Denton and Kate Kennerley did not doubt him; but all others of his former associates determined to shun him.

This however they were anticipated in, for Fred Forrester was not a man to be snubbed, and he gave the "cut direct" upon all sides to his brother-officers, while looking them squarely in the eyes, and the ladies he did not appear to see, but passed them without a glance in their direction.

And this they felt, for where they had meant to snub, they had been decidedly cut.

And thus under a cloud lived the young officer, keeping to his quarters when in the fort, and with Surgeon Frank Powell his only visitor.

No longer was his splendid voice heard in song, and his bugle, which he had been a fine performer on, hung untouched on the wall.

He went through his duties with marked devotion, ever prompt and ready, but never lingered an instant after his work was done, and completely ignored the existence of his brother-officers.

He became more devoted to his men, brought them up to more perfect discipline, and was wont to take long rides each day alone.

Invited to the general's quarters, and to Major Denton's, he would write his "regrets," for he would enter no home at the fort, not even returning his friend Powell's visits.

And thus ostracising himself lived Fred Forrester two months after that moonlight night in the timber, when Captain Kennerley had intrusted to him a treasure which he had failed to keep his pledge and deliver.

CHAPTER XV.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

ONE can readily conjecture, who has suddenly been brought face to face with death which no courage could subdue, how Buffalo Bill felt at the words of the renegade chief, Snow Face.

They implied that he, having come to the village and learned the secret of Irma's presence there, must not be allowed to go away and tell it.

For reasons, known only to himself and the woman, the white chief meant that she should remain unknown to those outside of the village.

Even to his friend, if friend Captain Brimstone was, Irma's presence must not be known.

How easy it was then for the chief to get rid of him, Buffalo Bill, and then send an Indian courier, as he had said he would, to Captain Brimstone with a letter, telling of his accidental death.

The scout was in a dangerous trap, and he realized it fully.

He determined to see just what the renegade chief intended to do before he acted.

The idea of escape he knew could not be entertained from that Indian village.

He had seen, on his coming in, that the passes were thoroughly guarded, for about them were the villages of the Sioux.

To go through these he must then meet outposts on the other side of the pass, while it was more than likely he could never get away from the cabin.

So he made up his mind to one thing, and that was to certainly put an end to the life of the renegade, whatever might be his fate, and then to do all the damage he could.

In other words, he would die game.

"Well, Mr. Benson, you see, much as I hate to do away with the faithful courier of my

friend Brimstone, I must do so," and with the words Snow Face assumed the baleful smile which had in it so much of deviltry.

"Do you mean, chief, that you intend to put me to death, simply to prevent its becoming known that you have here with you this lady?" and Buffalo Bill spoke with a coolness that showed his great nerve and won the admiration of both the man and the woman.

"That is just it, Pard Benson."

"You must have some deep reason for this?"

"I have."

"You are determined that no one shall know you have a white companion here with you?"

"I am."

"What does it matter?"

"That is my business, sir."

"I certainly can see no reason why you should dread me."

"I do, and more than any one else, for above all others I would not have Edmund Al—I mean, Captain Brimstone know of this lady's being here," and the marble-like face of the renegade chief slightly flushed at his having spoken the name in part of the road-agent captain, and then correcting himself as he hastily did.

"Yes, he above all others must not know," said the woman, firmly, and her eyes were riveted upon the face of the scout.

Buffalo Bill saw that, whatever the reason for the chief's keeping the secret, the woman knew it also.

"You forget that I am one of the Brotherhood, sir, and have no one to tell."

"No, you have your captain to tell."

"But I will vow secrecy."

"I will not believe you, my dear Mr. Benson," was the sneering reply.

"You will not believe me if I give you my solemn word, take oath in fact, not to reveal the presence of this lady in your camp?"

"I will not."

"Why not?"

"What is an outlaw's oath to him?"

"It is much to me, and—"

The scout had almost forgotten himself.

He was angered at being thought so vile, and he had nearly said that he had honor, dear to him as that of any man upon the border.

But he checked himself and said instead:

"Let me say to you, Chief Snow Face, that there is honor among thieves, and I would no more break my oath than I would slander my mother's memory."

"The Brimstone Brotherhood are outcasts, outlaws and all that, but I am one who will keep my pledge, be it to friend or foe."

The scout spoke warmly, and both the chief and the woman seemed to feel that he meant all that he said.

But the nature of the renegade made him suspicious still, and he said:

"I am not one to take the word, no, nor the oath of cut-throats."

"I trust no man, and but one woman."

"These red-skins, who fear me and call me chief, would be glad to burn me at the stake did they feel that they could gain more by it than than by letting me rule them as I now do."

"No, Mr. Benson, I am very sorry for you, sorry that Captain Brimstone did not send some other courier, whom I would have no regret in putting to death, for do you know I really like you, and you have an iron nerve that forces admiration."

"You have, indeed, sir," said the woman, and she did not speak in the sneering, sarcastic tone in which the renegade chief had spoken.

The scout bowed to her with a smile, and slightly changed his position, though apparently without any purpose in doing so.

Then the woman continued:

"With the chief, I will regret to see you die; but our secret must be kept inviolate, and the grave only can hide it, Mr. Benson, so you must die."

The scout cast a hasty glance about him, and then turned as though to see if the renegade had more to say.

But the latter was silent, as though for the moment lost in reverie.

So the scout asked:

"Then you mean to take my life, chief?"

"Yes, Pard Benson," and the reply came with a smile.

"I will give you my solemn oath not to betray, by word, writing or implication that this lady is in your camp, although, if Captain Brimstone is to have you for his ally, he will soon discover it, should he retreat here."

"No, I will see that he makes no such discovery."

"Will you, then, accept my oath of silence, chief?"

"No."

"You are firm in this resolve?"

"I am."

"You will put me to death?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"The sooner your suspense is over the better, for I like you, so care not to see you suffer."

"Then if I am to die, I will first play a bold game for life."

"Hands up, both of you!" and like a flash

Buffalo Bill had a revolver in each hand, covering both the renegade chief and the beautiful woman as well!

CHAPTER XVI.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

To say that the renegade chief and the woman were both fairly caught by the bold act of Buffalo Bill would be to but half express the situation.

The cabin, as I have said, was a large one, well-built, comfortable, and had been placed with a view of commanding every part of the valley.

The half-dozen villages were all in full view, and also in range of a twelve-pounder rifle-cannon which Snow Face had captured from a train carrying stores West.

It was placed in position, and could readily be used.

Then, under the shelter of the broad roof, extending over the piazza, were racks in which were fully a dozen rifles and as many revolvers.

The renegade certainly had his quarters well fortified.

Behind him was a retreating trail up the mountain-side, and a dozen men could hold it against a hundred.

Buffalo Bill had taken in the situation completely. He saw the trail in the rear, but he felt sure that it was guarded, if not at the base of the hill, further away over the range.

He knew that the chief must have his cabin home to himself, with his wife his sole companion, and perhaps a squaw under her control to do the work.

There was no one visible about the cabin, and, the Indians who brought him there having gone, there appeared to be no others about the premises.

His horse was there, hitched to a tree, and it would be easy to mount and dash away; but, whither?

If he went by the rear trail, then he would have to go on foot, for the passes, guarded by the Indian villages, he dared not attempt.

Determined not to be put to death without a bold stroke for life, he had changed his position, as has been seen, so as to bring the man and woman in line before him.

Then, at the last moment, he had acted, and so promptly, so boldly, that Snow Face and the woman, too, were at his mercy.

Against the woman the scout had no cause of quarrel.

It was the man he meant to rid the country of; but he had to threaten both, and he did.

Snow Face was a man who for once had been caught off his guard.

He was tricked, and it startled and angered him.

The man he knew only as Brick Benson, a confidential courier of Captain Brimstone.

That he was the noted scout Buffalo Bill never for an instant entered his head, and he saw in his desperate act only a brave man's fight for life.

But he was nonplused, and bit his lips in silence.

The scout's quick glance showed him that no Indian was near, and, from the position he had taken he knew that his movements were not visible to any one glancing in that direction, and then, too, what red-skin would suspect that anything was wrong with his chief?

The woman was the first to gain her presence of mind, and she burst into a merry laugh.

"Where the deuce is the fun in this, Irma?" asked the chief, sternly.

But the woman laughed again, and Buffalo Bill with a smile said:

"You take it coolly, madam, but it is a life for a life, and I swear not to be killed like a dog because my word will not be taken."

"You are right, and you are master of the situation; so, chief, you might as well ask for terms."

The renegade seemed to feel as much himself, and he realized fully that he had a desperate man to deal with.

"Well, Benson, you hold the best hand, so win the game," he said.

"Yes, and bullets are trumps this time, chief; but I don't wish to kill you, or your wife, so come to terms."

"What terms do you ask?"

Buffalo Bill was still playing the part of the dead road-agent, Benson, and he meant to play it to the end, so he was anxious to leave the Indian village in peace, and then to carry out another plan he had to go to the rendezvous with the Brimstone Brotherhood.

"I simply ask that you give me a letter for Captain Brimstone, and accept my oath that I will not betray to him the presence of this lady in your village."

"What do you think, Irma?" asked the renegade, anxious to get the woman's opinion, and at the same time see if he could not gain time, hoping that some of his braves might come to the cabin and change the situation.

"Well, Mr. Benson takes his oath under force, of course, and you, chief, are forced to accept it, so it is about a stand-off between

you, I think, and you can do nothing more than agree to his terms, as he is willing to agree to yours," and the woman's eyes were upon the face of the scout as she spoke.

"You will swear not to divulge the secret you have found out by coming here, if I will let you depart unmolested?"

"Yes, chief."

"Well, I agree, and I will write the letter, though there is no immediate hurry for your return."

"There is, sir, for I am expected back at once, so would like to leave at your very earliest convenience."

"I will write the letter; but in the mean time, Irma, look to the comfort of Mr. Benson," and the renegade chief turned and entered the cabin, while Buffalo Bill resumed his seat, remarking to the woman:

"I shall look to you, madam, that there is no treachery shown me."

"I came here in good faith as the bearer of Captain Brimstone's letter, and the chief should guard your presence here more securely if he does not wish it known."

"Still, Captain Brimstone will not learn of the fact through me."

"I trust not, for there is a good deal of the bloodhound in the nature of—of my husband, and he would never cease until he had tracked you to death, Mr. Benson, so be warned."

"I will be, thank you," was the dry response of the scout, and he seemed to be so thoroughly upon his guard that he declined any refreshments whatever, and seemed only anxious to get away from the cabin.

The woman seemed to consider it her duty to entertain him, and she chatted in a pleasant way, but was not so entertaining that the scout failed to note an Indian warrior pass not far away, going from the rear of the cabin toward the villages.

At least it appeared to be a red-skin, though Buffalo Bill felt sure that it was none other than the renegade chief, decked out in the Indian costume.

He watched him, without appearing to do so, and saw him disappear among the tepees of the nearest village, but soon after reappear and return toward the cabin, though keeping on a trail that would carry him by it at some distance off.

But Buffalo Bill, pretending to admire the scenery, moved about the piazza, and his quick, sly glances into the cabin showed that the chief was not visible.

A moment after through the hallway he saw the form of the pretended red-skin dart into the rear room of the cabin, and when he walked back to his seat a few moments after, there sat the chief at a table writing in the front room.

"That man means treachery to me," he muttered; but, as though not suspicious of the renegade, he talked on with the woman until Snow Face appeared, a letter in his hand, and remarked:

"I had so much to write to my old friend that it took me a long while."

"You will not remain longer?"

"No, chief, I must be off, and at once."

"It is useless to remind you that you are not to betray the presence of this lady in my village?"

"You have my pledge, sir," and Buffalo Bill thrust the letter into his pocket while the chief said:

"I will call my braves to conduct you beyond the outposts."

Taking a bugle from where it hung on the cabin wall, the renegade blew four sharp blasts, and soon after four red-skin horsemen came at a gallop toward the quarters of the white chief.

In the Sioux tongue the chief bade them lead the scout beyond the outer posts, saying that he was the friend of the red-skins and meant to enrich them, and the four warriors gave a word of assent, while the woman offered her hand in farewell.

Buffalo Bill grasped her hand, also that of the chief, and as he rode away, muttered to himself:

"They are as treacherous as snakes."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AMBUSH.

WHEN Buffalo Bill rode away from the cabin of the renegade chief, he went prepared for any treachery.

He was certain that the Indian he had seen going from the rear of the cabin to the village, and returning, was none other than the renegade chief, who had laid some plan to entrap him.

Pretending to take his oath, not to divulge the secret he wished kept, he had deemed it safer if Captain Brimstone's messenger was out of the way.

So, pretending to trust the chief and his braves, the scout rode along ready for a surprise at any minute.

But the red-skins showed no signs of hostility, and it was well for them that they did not, for Buffalo Bill's revolvers were cocked, and at the slightest move that looked dangerous he would have opened fire, and no man on the frontier

could fire with greater rapidity and more deadly aim than he.

They passed on through the village, at the pass by which he had come, and the red-skins regarded him curiously.

Then they led him over the range, and one pointed out the trail as they halted, with the laconic remark:

"Pale-face know trail by river."

"Take other trail, Sioux brave not know him and might kill."

"Yes; you mean for me to go back by the trail I came, and are going to scare me into it," thought the scout.

But he said:

"All right; good-by."

And he rode on his way.

"That chief has laid an ambush for me, and I know the very spot, I'll wager my horse against my guns."

"This trail has no turning-off place for five miles, and just before I reach the river there is a spot where an enemy in ambush could wipe out half a dozen men."

"I'll take the trouble to see if I am not right."

And, ten minutes after, leaving the Indian escort at the outer post, the scout halted just as the sun was setting.

He took his two blankets from his saddle, and cutting some brush with his knife rolled it up to about the size of his own body and bound it with his stake-ropes.

Then he rolled another blanket up tight, about the size of his leg, and tied it to the larger one in the middle.

"In the moonlight this will look like my body and legs, I guess," he said, and a hunting-jacket and shirt served as arms, when folded closely, and were hung to the top of the larger blanket.

Drawing off his high top-boots, he replaced them with moccasins taken from his saddle-pocket and fastened them into the stirrups.

The ends of the tightly-rolled blanket fitted into the boot-tops and hung over the saddle, while a couple of sticks were fastened on and held the dummy upright.

The large sombrero of the scout was then placed upon the top of the blanket, and even in the dying light of day, at a few paces, the dummy looked like a man, a buckskin shirt serving as head and face.

"If I had my own horse, I would be all right, for I could stop him with a call; but I'll have to hopple you," he said to the animal he rode, and this he proceeded to do, and in such a way that he could be released in an instant, and yet, if he attempted to run, could not get along very fast.

Having arranged matters to his satisfaction, just at dark he started the horse on ahead of him, while he walked behind, his rifle in his hand, and revolvers ready.

The moon was rising, and the "fake" certainly looked like a *bona fide* horseman even to the scout.

There was no danger of the horse dodging the trail, for this was impossible along the rocky way; but at first it was hard to make the animal do just as he wished.

At first he did not wish to go with his feet hopped.

Then, when forced to do this, he went as fast as he could, at a jerking pace that threatened to dislodge his dummy rider from the saddle.

Then he went too slow; but at last he walked along at a good pace, and the scout was satisfied.

He kept some sixty feet behind him, walking noiselessly in his buckskin moccasins, and knowing that the horse would not enter the river, hopped as he was, so that he could catch up and ride across, should the ambush he felt sure was prepared for him, be upon the other side.

Still, he could not but think that the ambush must be upon this side, in the spot he had observed closely as he came along, and then mentally remarked upon as the very place for an enemy to lie in wait to annihilate a foe.

As he felt that he was nearing the spot, Buffalo Bill hastened on and overtook the horse, and made fast to the dummy a twine string, which he unrolled and carried back with him fully a hundred feet.

A pull upon this would dismount his pretended horseman, and his foes would doubtless rush upon him for his scalp.

Then it would be his time to take a hand in the affair, for should his horse, becoming startled, run away, he could not go either very fast or far.

So the horse moved on once more, now in the moonlight, now in the shadow of the overhanging trees on the rocky trail, until Buffalo Bill knew that if the enemy were in ambush, the next minute must tell the story.

That he was right, in his muttered words upon leaving the cabin of the renegade chief, that they were as "treacherous as snakes," the next minute proved, for from each side on the trail, from a position in the rocks, came the flash of two rifles, and the sharp reports.

The startled horse wheeled, and a pull on the long twine string by the scout dismounted the dummy, though its falling lightly, for a man's

weight, did not seem to attract the attention of the ambuscaders, cunning as they were.

"How many have I got to fight now?" muttered the scout, as he cleverly caught the horse on his way back on the trail, and by a quick turn of the bridle-rein, made it fast to the lariat hoppers.

A few seconds after the first fire, two more shots rung out, and the dull thud of the bullets striking the dummy reached the ears of the scout, who muttered:

"They'll shoot my blanket full of holes; but they wish to be sure," and with the words came two blood-curdling war-whoops of triumph from the rocks.

"Only two," muttered the scout, who knew, had there been more, a perfect chorus of yells would announce the joy of a foe's death.

And down from their hiding-place sprung two tall forms, one in the full feathers of a chief, and with mighty bounds they rushed upon their supposed victim to tear the trophy of triumph from his head.

But as one bent over the body there came a flash and report from up the trail, and another followed in quick succession.

Without a moan, without time for a death-cry, the two red-skins sunk in their tracks, and Buffalo Bill came forward.

"Ah! this is Cut Nose, the meanest red-skin chief among the Sioux."

"Snow Face meant that there should be no escape for me when he sent this man," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he recognized the Indian chief, who, some years before had lost his nose from a saber-cut, and since then had won fame as a red fiend whenever he took the war-path.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DUMB COURIER.

It was no pleasant place to remain, there on the trail within a few miles of the red-skin village, from whose midst he had taken two of its people, so Buffalo Bill was anxious to be on his way.

He felt almost sure that the Indian outpost had heard the firing, but, as they doubtless were aware of the trap set to kill him, they might think the reports of the rifles all right, though suspicion might be aroused that there had been six shots.

When Cut Nose, a noted Indian dead-shot, was concerned, and a chief as well, was one of the two sent to kill him, Buffalo Bill thought wisely that the outposts would hardly think that he had had to fire six shots to end the life of one man, and the victim not expecting to be attacked.

So he quickly decided to move on and place as much space as possible between him and his pursuers in the shortest time possible.

But, fully convinced of the renegade's treachery, he could not resist the temptation to let him know how he regarded him, so taking a slip of paper from his pocket, and a pencil, he hastily wrote:

"The treachery of Snow Face, the renegade, was not successful, as he will see by this note from his intended victim, who, having just such characters to deal with as he is himself, and understanding Indian nature, felt sure of a trap, and so surprised Chief Cut Nose and his brave, if they lived long enough to feel any surprise."

"It would be best, if Chief Snow Face intends to deal with Captain Brimstone, not to let his people know that I killed the two red-skins, but let him suit his own pleasure as to that; I merely throw out a suggestion."

"He has my oath not to betray my discovery, and in spite of his treachery, I shall consider it binding upon me not to divulge his secret, nor will I say aught to Captain Brimstone of how his courier was treated, and his death planned."

"D. B. OF THE B. B."

"This may stand for Brick Benson of the Brimstone Brotherhood, and it does stand for Buffalo Bill," said the scout, with a grim smile, as he placed the paper upon a stick and stuck it up by the side of the body of Cut Nose.

He knew that the red-skins who found it, would take the "talking paper," as the Sioux called writing, to their chief, and he would interpret it to them to please himself, if need to tell them anything.

So the paper was left by the dead red-skins, and, hastily undoing his dummy man, Buffalo Bill mounted his horse and dashed away at a swift gallop.

He soon reached the river, and plunging in, crossed to the other side, where he again set out at a rapid canter.

For several hours he pressed on, and then, confident that, even in the bright moonlight his trail could not be followed, he turned off into the mountains and sought a camping-place for the remainder of the night.

He did wish that it was in his power to go to the fort and report his progress thus far to General Carr, but he was anxious to go upon his second venture and reach the rendezvous of the outlaws, after having fully learned the surrounding country.

His first risk had all been in his favor; but how would the second one end?

If he was suspected of being an enemy, he was determined that no conscientious scruples

should stand in the way of his getting out of a bad scrape.

To enter the camp of the Brimstone as Brick Benson the Deserter Sergeant; and in reality be Buffalo Bill, the deadliest foe of the outlaws, he knew was playing with life in a very foolhardy way.

But the results he hoped would prove worthy of the tremendous risks, and there was that in the nature of the daring scout that made him rather enjoy the danger he ran to gain the end he sought.

He had discovered what he had suspected was the case, that Snow Face had not before been the ally of Captain Brimstone.

He knew that now they were to be, and this would give the Brimstone a far greater power for devilry than ever before.

That they had been known to each other in the past he also knew, as well as that the renegade had some reason to dread the outlaw chief of the Robber Brotherhood.

His resemblance to Brick Benson was serving him well; but would it hold out?

True, the dead Deserter Sergeant had told him that the men went masked, so that was in his favor, but then Captain Brimstone knew all his men, and there was the danger to him.

So far he had found out nothing in favor of Lieutenant Fred Forrester.

So far matters seemed decidedly against him, from what the Deserter Sergeant had said, for if he had been robbed, as he had reported, by the Brimstone Brotherhood, then Brick Benson certainly should have known something about it.

"I fear that horse may be found, so I guess I had best take no chance and send him to the fort."

"It will be safer," muttered Cody, as he once more went on his way, now heading for the canyon where he had left his horse.

Several days after he arrived, and found the animal safe, and well rested, but he was rapidly diminishing the grass in the basin, so he concluded that it was best to send him to the fort, for he knew that he would go there, once more started upon the trail.

Taking some paper and his pencil, he wrote as follows, in a cipher known to the general, and which he had made up, for his scouts to communicate with him, so that if taken it could not be read without a key:

"CANYON IN LONE RANGE,
Thursday."

"GENERAL:—

"I have been to the village of Snow Face, and know all about its strength, trails and other valuable information, for I have spent days in finding out."

"It is needless to say I passed muster as Brick Benson, the Deserter Sergeant, but I made a narrow escape which I will tell you of, though not once was I suspected of being other than the sergeant."

"I have decided that it is best to send my horse back to the fort, as I leave for the rendezvous of the Brotherhood, and I hope my second venture will turn out as well as my first, on this strange trail I am following."

"So far I have learned nothing in favor of Lieutenant Forrester, nor have I discovered aught more against him."

"His trail, on his trip after the hidden saddlebags was too cold even for a hound to follow, so I accept his innocence still, until I have proof of his guilt."

"In case of my never returning, I have left my papers and affairs arranged so that my death will harm no one."

"With respect,

"Your obedient servant."

"W. F. CODY,
Chief of Scouts, U. S. A."

This note was carefully folded and tied around the horn of the saddle, and the good horse was led forth from the canyon and his reins tied up over his head so that he could not trip on them.

Then he was taken some distance upon the trail to the fort and started upon his way as a dumb courier.

Buffalo Bill saw him set off at a canter, and watching him until he was out of sight, mounted the deserter's horse and started upon his second perilous venture.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISSING.

It was soon discovered by all who had decided to "cut dead" Lieutenant Fred Forrester, as a means of showing that they deemed him guilty, notwithstanding the verdict of the court-martial before which he was tried, that he gave them no chance to do so, but on the contrary really was the one to cut them.

He was most punctilious in his respect for his superior officers when on duty, but there was a coldness in his manner and sternness about his face that showed discipline alone prompted it when duty demanded it.

To General Carr, Major Denton and Surgeon Powell his manner was respectful and almost sad, as though he felt sympathy for them for their trust in him.

To the men he was ever kind and gentle in manner, except on duty, and then his voice rung out sharp, stern, and with a tone as if glad to give vent to his feelings by expressing them in ringing tones.

His position was an unfortunate one, a sad one, yet he was not crushed, and others felt his presence when he seemed unconscious of them.

The illness of the post adjutant forced him into the position for awhile, and his discipline was perfect, his work untiring.

Courteous he was, but it was a severe, a stinging courtesy.

Well did he know that his good name was tarnished, that he was under a cloud which it seemed would never rise and let him see light ahead.

He had given up all visiting, even to Powell's quarters, except visits of military duty, and he never touched a card, or was seen to.

He moved alone and lived alone, devoting his leisure when indoors to work or reading, and off duty often went for a long ride over the prairies, but whither no one knew.

Now and then, when on parade, he would come face to face with Mrs. Denton or Kate Kennerley, and he would bend low in acknowledgment of their kindly greeting, but seem to wish to avoid speaking to them.

In the face of all their friends to thus favor him the two ladies showed a great deal of courage, but then Mabel Denton was a plucky woman and generally acted to please herself and her husband, while Kate, feeling that she was doing right, was utterly indifferent to the opinions of others regarding her acts.

Once on the grounds, when the parade was over, she deliberately walked over and headed Lieutenant Forrester off as he was leaving the spot where the general stood.

She had called to a young officer, who was her devoted admirer, and said:

"Your arm please, Mr. Blackford."

Honored and pleased, he had gladly offered it, to turn pale when he saw her intention and heard her words:

"One moment please, Lieutenant Forrester."

Fred Forrester's face flushed and then paled, but he doffed his hat and turned to the maiden with a stiff:

"Yes, Miss Kennerley."

"I wish to ask your advice."

"Mine?"

"Yes, of course, for I believe you are capable of advising me well."

"I am at Miss Kennerley's service."

"Thank you; but what I wish to know is if you think it really dangerous for me to ride out upon the prairie?"

"Without an escort?"

"Certainly."

"I certainly think so, Miss Kennerley."

"Yes, there are outlaws abroad, you know, Miss Kennerley," drawled Burke Blackford, with a wicked look at Forrester.

The latter's face did not change, but there was an expression in his eyes that told he had heard the remark, and understood it as a slur at him.

"I did not ask your advice, Mr. Blackford, for I know you seldom go far enough from the fort to discover dangers surrounding it," said Kate Kennerley, with biting sarcasm, and the face of the young officer crimsoned under her words, while he replied quickly:

"I obey orders, Miss Kennerley."

"I would, as Miss Kennerley has asked my advice, tell her she should not go far from the fort without an escort of at least an officer and a dozen soldiers."

"Thank you; but I wish to ride without company often, and I am fond of sketching, so care not to be bothered even with an officer as an escort; but the danger, what can it be?"

"From outlaws, or roving bands of Indians."

"Surely not near the fort—say at the Twin Cottonwoods over on the river, for I wish to sketch that scene when the sun is near its setting?"

"It is two miles away, and I would say do not go without an escort," and the lieutenant bowed and walked away.

All had seen Kate's bold act, but the presence of Burke Blackford with her had shown that she sought no private interview with the ostracized officer.

As for Blackford, he was angry, with Kate and with Forrester, who must have observed the cut she gave him, and as they walked toward the major's quarters, he said:

"Miss Kennerley seems marked in her attentions to Mr. Forrester, and she placed me in rather an awkward position, for she knows that I do not speak to him."

Kate replied in an easy way:

"As Mr. Blackford seems to like speaking in the third person, I will reply in the same strain, and say to him that I observed that Mr. Forrester did not notice his existence, even, and I regret having made it awkward therefore for Mr. Blackford."

The young officer winced under the words, and responded:

"Do you intend to go on a ride as you said, Miss Kennerley?"

"I do."

"May I not be your escort?"

"No, for I wish to go alone, as I will not be disturbed in my work."

"I will remain silent, and only serve as a sentinel, and as a guard from danger."

"I am not afraid of danger, and will go alone, thank you."

"Will the major permit it?"

"I am my own mistress, so shall do as I please."

"You are incorrigible; but when do you go?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

And on the following afternoon Kate mounted her horse, and alone, for she declined many offers of escort, she rode out of the fort, and took the trail for the "Twin Cottonwoods."

And that evening Lieutenant Forrester was "absent without leave" from parade, and when night came on Kate Kennerley had not returned, and the whole garrison were in alarm, for a scout coming in had reported Indians in the vicinity of the post.

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR PRIZE.

GENERAL CARR was, or rather is, for he is yet an honored officer of the army, an ideal soldier.

Yet he had a heart as tender as a woman, and was hurt to feel that Fred Forrester was so unkindly, cruelly dealt with by his brother officers and the ladies of the fort.

He knew that the young officer had been wild, extravagant and reckless, with a spice of dissipation; but on duty there had never been the slightest cause of complaint against him.

He was prompt, a perfect disciplinarian, and one of the best officers in the army, while his courage was known to all, and his men idolized him.

He had, in a friendly way, hinted to him that it would be well to get an exchange, and the reply had been proudly given:

"General Carr, I thank you, but the crime that I am accused of is known to the entire army, and would follow me wherever I went."

"Did I resign it would dog my steps in private life and prevent my obtaining employment."

"No, sir; a court-martial has given the verdict that I am not guilty, and I shall live down the charge made in secret that I am."

So the general said no more, and the subject was dropped.

Then the sentinel reported one day a riderless horse coming to the fort.

It was soon seen to be Buffalo Bill's horse, and there was much dread of evil to the scout.

The animal was tired and covered with sweat and foam, showing that he had come a long distance and rapidly.

Lieutenant Forrester's quick eye had observed that the reins had been securely fastened to the saddle-horn, and then caught sight of the paper tied there, and in an instant had detached it.

It was addressed simply:

"FOR GENERAL CARR."

Taking it to the general the young officer reported the coming of the scout's horse, and handed to him the letter, the contents of which are already known to the reader.

"Any orders, sir?" he asked as the general read the cipher message slowly and with clouded brow.

"None."

With a salute Fred Forrester left, and the general began to pace to and fro.

"Some time Cody will go too far in his reckless courage, and I fear very much that he has done so now."

"I could never replace him outside of the friendship I feel for him."

"Well, if he does not return in a week or ten days I will lay the matter before Surgeon Powell, who is almost equal to Cody as a scout, and his knowledge of wild life out here."

It was some days after this that Kate Kennerley so pluckily called to Lieutenant Forrester after parade, and on the day following had been missing when night came on, as was also the outcast officer.

Kate Kennerley was a perfect horsewoman, and as fearless as a woman can well be.

She had mounted her favorite horse, and with her portfolio, containing her unfinished sketch of the scenery about the Twin Cottonwoods, and her pencils, camp-stool and easel strapped to the rear of the saddle, had gone to the spot which she wished to sketch.

Mrs. Denton was out making calls, the major was asleep in the library, and so Kate had gone, as it were in military parlance, "without leave."

She knew the spot well, having often ridden there, and she went along rapidly until she came to the two large cottonwoods, growing close together and connected by a branch between them.

She found her favorite view, dismounted and staked out her horse, and seating herself upon her camp-stool, easel in front of her, began work which was a pleasure, for she was naturally an artist.

The two trees stood alone, at the head of a glen that sloped to the river, while beyond, on the other bank, were high cliffs.

It was a strikingly pretty scene, and her artist's eye had at once observed it when she had passed there one day.

Suddenly over the hill-top rode two men.

They caught sight of her, as they were upon

the trail leading across the glen, and quickly draw their horses back out of sight.

"Thar must be sogers about, pard, fer thar are a petticoat," said one.

"Maybe thar be, and maybe not," answered the other.

"Ef thar be?"

"Then we wants ter git."

"If thar don't be no sogers round?"

"Then I guesses thar is money thar."

"As how?"

The man hesitated before he spoke.

He seemed to become lost in deep meditation.

They were a precious-looking pair of rascals, and had met on the trail the day before, both going in the same direction.

They had met before, because they were acquainted with each other in the mines, and had been engaged in several very shady operations together.

Now they had met on the prairie, both thoroughly armed, well mounted, prepared for a journey, and they were going in the same direction.

One was a brunette, the other a blonde, and both had villain indelibly stamped upon their faces.

A short talk together had divulged the secret of each, for they were on the way to meet Captain Brimstone and become members of his band, so they decided to travel together until near the place, and then, according to orders, put on masks, and thus arrive at the rendezvous.

In answer to the question of how there was money in the glen, the brunette, who was known as Brass, replied:

"Cheeky, yer seen it were a woman?"

"Yas."

"She were drawing pictur's?"

"She were."

"Waal, ther fort are but a couple o' mile away, so she are ther darter o' some officer, you kin bet."

"Or his wife?"

"Nary, fer when wimmens is married, they gives up ther leetle games o' drawin', music an' sich, which they hev larnt ter catch husbands with, so she are a darter, and maybe of a big one in rank."

"I see you knows, Brass."

"I does, and I knows ef she are alone, and I don't see no one, we kin jist lay a leetle racket ter git some money out o' it."

"As how?"

"Waal, we'll look around and see ef she be alone, and ef so, you jist sail in and capter her."

"You then run off with her, a-takin' ther trail ther way we is goin', and I'll ride on ahead like ther deuce, so I kin head yer off."

"Yas."

"Then I'll jist come up and rescuo the ledly, don't yer see, and this wound thet Injun give me back on ther trail, two hours ago, will fit in prime."

"Then I'll take her on ter ther fort, leavin' you pretendin' ter be dead on ther pararer, for yer must die, yer know, fer sham, and as I'll play poor devil, why, they'll pan out a hundred or two ter me and I'll dervide with yer even."

"Maybe yer will, and maybe yer won't, Brass; but I'll git su'thin' out o' it, so here goes ter capter ther gal as soon as we has diskivered thar ain't no sogers around."

And dismounting, the two began to reconnoiter the situation to carry out their rascally scheme.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CAPTIVE.

THE two villains took in the situation completely, and to their joy discovered that no soldiers were about.

Kate Kennerley appeared to be all alone, and so busily at work with her sketching that she did not see them or suspect danger to herself.

A hundred feet away her horse was staked out and feeding, she having removed the bit from his mouth.

"Waal, Pard Brass, she are our game, but don't yer think thar is more money in it ef we first carries her to ther captin'?"

"We has got ter go alone yer knows, Cheeky, to ther cap'n."

"That are so; but ef yer was ter take her, wouldn't ther cap'n negotiate fer a good ransom fer her and hold her until it were paid?"

"Yas, guess he would; but then it would be a case o' long division, in which all ther gang would git some o' ther dust."

"I guesses we kin make more out o' it ourselves, all by our leetle lone selves."

"We kin ef yer derwides squar'."

"Pard Cheeky, I hain't stole nothin' from you, so jist let up on thet, and let's git ter work, fer it are money in our pockets ef it be but a few."

"Now you go in an' make ther capter, and I'll wait until I sees yer has done it, and then I'll light out along ther trail and you foller."

"When yer reaches ther open perarer some miles away, yer'll see me comin', an' jist keep yer eye open on my gallant rescuo o' a lone female from a villain, don't yer see."

"I opens on yer—"

"Don't shoot no bullets."

"No; I hain't goin' ter hurt yer, and you must shoot, too, and we'll hev a race."

"I'll overtake yer, and when I gits near I'll yank ther rag off this wound and show what a hero I be, while you takes a tumble on ther pararer, and I'll say you is dead."

"And my horse?"

"Waal, will he leave yer, does yer guess?"

"I guesses not, fer he are trained."

"So here goes, then."

And the two scamps set to work to carry out their plot.

Until a shadow fell upon her sketch, Kate Kennerley did not suspect the presence near her of a human being.

Then she started as she beheld the evil face of the man standing near her, and yet she demanded, sternly:

"Well, sir, what do you want?"

Cheeky had won his name from his enormous cheek, and he deserved it; but the cool manner of the brave girl for a moment disconcerted him.

"What do you wish here, sir?" Kate Kennerley demanded again, and she arose and looked the man squarely in the face.

There was not an atom of fear visible in her manner, but she knew the man was not from the fort, and she read the sign which nature stamped upon his face for villainy but too well not to be in dread of him.

"As yer is cur'us ter know, miss, I wants yer-self, so jist gather up yer traps and come along with me," replied Cheeky, who had recovered from his first surprise.

"How dare you speak so, sir, to me? Be off, or I shall call for help!"

"Callin' and gittin' are two different things, miss, and I says you go with me."

"Whither?"

"I takes yer ter ther mountains, whar yer kin stay until I gits big pay fer yer return."

"Ab! you are a kidnapper," and the beautiful face paled, while the man continued, in his cool way:

"About thet, miss; but come; we hain't no time to throw away, so git yer traps."

"If I must, I must," said Kate, with a sigh, and she began to gather up her things.

But there was a daring flash in her eyes, as though she meant mischief.

"Where are your fellow-villains?" she asked, as she moved toward her horse.

"Oh, they is around," assured Cheeky, who was somewhat cowed by this imperious, beautiful girl, and thought it best not to let her know he was alone.

Then, carrying her things, she moved to her horse, and Cheeky followed.

With a sudden spring she was by the side of the animal, grasping at the butt of a revolver she carried in the saddle-holster.

But the scamp saw her act, and hurled the revolver he had in his hand, to awe her, at the horse, and striking him, the blow caused him to bound away.

He was halted by the stake-rope, but the act had prevented Kate from getting possession of her revolver, and the man had sprung to her side with the savage remark:

"None o' thet, young ledly, or I'll tie yer hand and foot, and I guesses it would be ther safest way anyhow."

"No, no, do not tie me, for I will go with you without it," she urged, nearly crushed by her failure to get possession of her weapon.

The man now put the bit in the mouth of Kate's horse, adjusted the reins, and strapped her traps to the saddle, while she quietly regarded him.

Then he said:

"Come here, miss, and I'll lift yer inter yer saddle."

"Thank you, but I do not wish you to touch me," and with a bound she was in her saddle.

"You is as spry as a frog on the jump, miss, and I guesses yer kin use this weepin' I has tuk from yer saddle-holster."

"Yes, I am a dead shot, and I only wish I had you for a target."

"Waal, yer hain't goin' ter git me fer no target, so don't yer think so," and with a loud, shrill call to his horse, that animal, which he had left in a thicket not far distant, came trotting to his side.

Kate gave a sigh of relief as she saw that there were no others, and she made up her mind that she would make a dash for liberty when she got the chance, for she well knew how fleet her horse was.

But Cheeky dashed her hopes to the ground by tying the stake-rope of her horse to his saddle-horn.

Then he mounted and led the way out of the glen, up toward the spot where he had left his companion.

But as he did so there suddenly dashed into sight a horseman, coming down the steep slope on the other side of the glen, and coming directly toward him.

Cheeky was taken by surprise, but he drove the spurs into his horse, and the two animals dashed away, while the kidnapper gave a long, wild yell, hoping that it would reach the ears of Brass, for he now knew that he would have to

fight, as the horseman was well mounted and wore an officer's fatigue uniform.

Brass had, only a minute before, turned from the hill, where he had witnessed the maiden's capture, to dash along the trail and play his game of rescue.

But the call of Cheeky caused him to turn about, and dashing back to his former situation he saw what had occurred.

Instantly he threw his rifle to his shoulder and took a quick aim.

The horse of the officer dropped in his tracks, and but for the agility of the rider he would have been thrown heavily.

But as it was he caught upon his feet, and yet he was dismounted and saw the maiden being carried rapidly away by her kidnappers, for, having shown himself, Brass could not carry out his just formed plot of rescue, but had to join Cheeky in his flight with the prisoner, as he feared that where there was an officer there must be soldiers also.

Kate's first impulse had been to spring from her saddle, but ere she could carry it out, as though reading her intention, Cheeky had seized his lariat from his saddle-horn, and throwing the coil about her, said:

"Now, if yer jumps yer gits dragged ter death, so jist don't do it."

Kate uttered a startled cry as she saw the officer's horse go down, and then her heart sunk with dread as Brass wheeled alongside of her, and between her two captors she was carried swiftly along the top of the ridge.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RESCUER.

THE one who had so suddenly dashed to the rescue was none other than Lieutenant Fred Forrester.

The young officer had scouted much with Buffalo Bill, and had accompanied Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout, on many of his expeditions, so that he had become an adept in prairie-craft.

Having seen Kate Kennerley leave the fort, as he was returning alone from a hunt, he had drawn back out of sight, over a prairie rise, and was determined to be near should she need a protector, for he was well aware of the danger she ran in going out alone.

He made a flank movement and gained a distant hill, where he could see into the glen near the Twin Cottonwoods.

Here, with his field-glass, he had seen the kidnappers, and felt sure that they were up to some devilry, and he at once made his way along the ridge to thwart them.

He knew that he was due at the fort, or soon would be, for parade, but that did not disturb him just then, when his services were needed.

Gaining a position near the cottonwoods, he dashed out to the rescue of Kate, who he now saw was a prisoner.

The shot of Brass was a center one, for he had hastily dismounted, upon seeing the reason of Cheeky's call, and taking deliberate aim, with his rifle thrown over his saddle, had fired.

The bullet was aimed at the officer's heart, but the head of his horse caught it squarely in the center.

Down went the splendid animal, and Fred Forrester caught upon his feet.

He had his rifle in hand, for he had been hunting on the prairies, but he dared not risk a shot with the two men now on each side of Kate, so he determined to play a ruse, so fell, as though he had been also hurt.

Kate Kennerley saw this, and, with the two kidnappers, was deceived.

"Yer got his horse and winged him, Pard Brass," said Cheeky.

"Yas, it were a double shot, but I kin hardly believe he are hard hit with ther same bullet as kilt his horse."

"But we parts comp'ny with him right here."

And over the hill dashed the two outlaws and their captive, whose white face now showed that she realized her full danger, as also that perhaps Lieutenant Forrester was seriously, if not fatally, wounded in attempting to save her.

The thought was a bitter one indeed to her.

But hardly had the three horses and their riders disappeared over the ridge, when Lieutenant Forrester sprung to his feet.

He had wished to give the impression that he was wounded and so they need not push on very rapidly for fear of pursuit from the fort.

He was about to bound away at a run for Fort Fairview, when to his surprise and joy he beheld his horse stagger to his feet.

With a bound he was by the side of the animal, and then he discovered that the bullet had hit him squarely in the forehead and flattened there, not even fracturing the bone, though the shock had temporarily stunned the animal.

The wound was there, and the flattened bullet fell into his hand as he placed his fingers upon the cut.

Quickly he led the horse, a little shaky in his legs at first, but gaining strength as he went along, to the river and gave him a drink of water, at the same time bathing the wound.

The horse seemed to be as good as ever in a few minutes, and going to the ridge the officer examined the trails, and muttered to himself:

"They will keep along the river to the ford six miles above, and I will swim the river here and head them off."

He mounted and rode down to the river-bank, which was steep and dangerous to descend to the water.

But he urged his horse to make the leap, and was soon breasting the dangerous and swift current.

There were ravines or water-washes on the other bank, and into one of these he went and, after giving his horse a rest of a few minutes, he mounted and rode off at a swift, sweeping gallop.

There was a bend in the river there, and he knew that he could cut across, going a couple of miles, while the kidnappers would have three times that distance to travel.

Even if they did not cross the river at the ford, he could see which way they went and be close upon their heels, did he not have time to get across the stream and lie in wait for them.

He knew that it would be night within the hour, and what he did must be done by daylight, or they would dodge him in the darkness.

At last he drew his horse up in a thicket near the ford and waited.

He had not long to wait, for soon the kidnappers and their victim came in sight.

They were riding rapidly, Kate Kennerley between the two men, and they were coming directly toward the ford.

It was a dangerous ford, for the way across was upon a bar, with whirlpools above and below, and the water rose to the stirrups.

Should a horse make a misstep, then the life of the animal and his rider were in danger, as the swift current would bear them away, and below, not an eighth of a mile, was a fall where sure death threatened them, as the banks on either side were precipitous and no landing could be made.

This did Fred Forrester know, and he would wait until they reached the shore, then drop the two kidnappers by rapid shots at close range, and be master of the situation.

So it seemed to him, and he arranged accordingly.

But, as they neared the shore in the now gathering twilight, the horse of the young officer, startled by the yelp of a coyote near him in the bushes, drew suddenly back, broke his rein, and came galloping into view.

The outlaws halted, hastily consulted, and were turning about when Fred Forrester determined to risk a shot.

Should they reach the other shore, before he could catch his horse and catch up with them it would be dark, and then pursuit would be impossible.

He therefore sprung out from cover, brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired.

The shot caught the horse of Brass just as he was turning, and the animal, mortally wounded, with a plunge, was swept away, his rider wildly struggling to free himself from his saddle, but in vain, as the steed was hurled over and over and the outlaw with him, as they swept on toward the falls and certain death.

Fred Forrester was about to fire again, when he saw that the lariat of the other outlaw was about Kate's waist, so he checked his intention, knowing that she too would be dragged from her saddle by the dead, or wounded man, and swept away to death.

So he called out sternly:

"Ride ashore here, sir, or I will kill you!"

Cheeky was fairly caught, and what was more, he was unnerved by the fate of his companion, whose wild cries for help came to his ears.

Then too he recognized the man he believed lying wounded on the other side of the river, and half a dozen miles back on the trail, and perhaps he was not alone.

So he called out:

"I caves, cap'n, and throws up ther game."

CHAPTER XXIII.

LYING IN WAIT.

It will be remembered that, after having sent his horse back to the fort, with his letter to General Carr, giving that officer a description of the situation, Buffalo Bill set forth to carry out the daring plot, daring almost to desperation, which he had formed to play the part of Brick Benson in the rendezvous of the Brimstone Brotherhood.

It was true that his resemblance to the Deserter Sergeant was striking, and it had often been remarked upon in the fort in the past.

And yet the scout was not a man whose counterpart could be readily found, so remarkable was his appearance, in fine physique and handsome face.

And had the two, the Deserter Sergeant and the scout, been side by side, to undergo a critical comparison, it would have been seen that Buffalo Bill was a trifle taller, and better formed, while his face was full of manliness and dignity, and the fugitive soldier's countenance was reckless and by no means so handsome.

The color of their hair was similar, however, and their eyes alike, in a measure, while they both wore a mustache and imperial, but where the scout had small feet and hands, the deserter had been very liberally supplied with pedal extremities and had hands like a giant.

But Buffalo Bill had put on the sergeant's boots, and his clothing, armed himself with his weapons, and taken his horse, saddle, bridle and traps, so that he could pass muster very well as the deserter, and more, he meant to do so.

He had his letter from Snow Face, the renegade, and under all circumstances, as he also had the sergeant's mask, he did not doubt being able to play his part to perfection.

If he failed, he well knew that death was his portion; but this did not deter him, and he headed his horse for the mountain rendezvous of the Brimstone Brotherhood, where the dying Deserter Sergeant had told him Captain Brimstone was to meet his band and organize, with as much confidence as though he was in reality the man he impersonated.

In the mean time there were others bound upon the same mission, and coming from a score of mining-camps, and half as many different quarters.

Captain Brimstone had chosen his men well. His long experience in the mines had taught him to know men thoroughly, and he had decided upon those he wanted, and yet they knew nothing of the honor done them until a masked man appeared before them, and a conversation followed after this wise:

"My man, I want you for a special service, and there is gold in it."

"Who is yer, pard?"

"It matters not, and more, I do not care to know who you are, and those you serve with need not know."

"But I want you for red work, and yellow gold will pan out of it, so say if you go."

"I does, if it hain't no trap."

"If there is a trap, we will all be caught together; but say if you are my man and I give you a bounty of fifty dollars right here."

"I'm yer man, pard."

The money was paid, a mask given the man, and he was told to be at a certain date at a specified spot in the mountains.

A few others were engaged by letter, and some two dozen men were making their way toward the rendezvous, to be there at the time specified by the Masked Chief.

He had gone before, as has been seen, and he was on the watch for his men coming in.

One by one he met several until he had four together, all masked, and all unknown to each other.

Then he bade them to go on a raid, following a certain trail, adding:

"I have reason to fear that some scout may be sent out here from the fort; perhaps it may be that terror, Buffalo Bill, and I wish you to capture him and bring him to me, for we are not to be dogged to our retreat."

"While you are away I will pick up my other men as they come in, and will have all ready for organization; but remember, you go masked, for I wish no man of my league to know who his comrades are."

With this the four masked men were sent off on the trail, one acting as leader, and sooner than they had anticipated, they found game, and big game at that.

They had not left the range, but were about to start forth upon the prairie when one of the party sighted a horseman coming along the trail which they were about to take.

He was out upon the prairie, and the trail he was following would lead him directly to the spot where they were.

One of the men had a small, weather-stained opera-glass, which he had stolen from army headquarters somewhere, had made use of as a field-glass, and hardly had he leveled it upon the coming horseman when he called out excitedly:

"Pards, it are Buff'ler Bill, or I lies like a peddler."

The glass was passed from one to the other, and raised to the eyes looking out from the black masks, and each one said that the man was right, for the horseman was Buffalo Bill.

The noted scout was known to each of them, and feared by all.

"He's our game, pards," said the leader, to whom Captain Brimstone had given a number instead of a name, calling him *Number Two*, for the Deserter Sergeant had been put at the head of the list as *Number One*.

"Yas, he is as good as hanged, pards, for we has ther game on him here, and he'll ride right under the nooses o' our lariats, for we has ter take him alive, as ther cap'n said we war ter fetch in our game livin', if it war possible," remarked the man who was known as *Number Four*.

"Yas, git yer stands, and yer lariats ready, and throw tergether when I gives ther word."

"You, Four and Five, take ther horse, and you, Three, take ther scout with me, so we gits both."

And, all unconscious, this horseman was riding straight into the trap set for him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

BUFFALO BILL was not even suspicious of danger, for he knew he was in a locality where he might meet with foes, and even if he met a scouting party of soldiers from the fort it would be a regret, for he wished to avoid them, playing the part as he was of Brick Benson, the Deserter Sergeant.

Then, too, there might be roving bands of Sioux, who did not know the Brimstone Brotherhood as the allies of their white chief, Snow Face, or Cheyennes who would be only too willing to take a scalp, no matter whose it might be.

So he approached the hills cautiously, but, keen as were his eyes he could discover no suspicious signs, and was congratulating himself upon being soon at the rendezvous which Captain Brimstone had appointed for the outlaws to meet in, when suddenly there shot forth from among the rocks four dark objects, a whirring sound was heard, and quick as he was he was not able to free himself from the lariat that settled upon him.

His horse, too, had been just as skillfully noosed, and was brought to a halt very suddenly, as he half-wheeled to bound away.

The men who had thrown the ropes were certainly skillful hands, and each man's aim had been sure.

The scout's arms were held so tight against his side that he was unable to draw a weapon, and his horse was gasping with the lariats around his neck.

Had Buffalo Bill had the slightest chance, in spite of heavy odds, he would have made a dash for liberty.

Then out of their coverts sprung the four masked outlaws, still holding their lariats taut as they gathered around him, while one of the men who held a rope around the neck of the horse had his revolver leveled full at their prisoner, while he said:

"Ef yer c'u'd raise yer hands, Buff'ler Bill, I'd say up with 'em; but as yer isn't able, I jest says don't show no sign of fight, for yer'll die mighty suddint ef yer does."

"Who did you call me?" asked the scout, now with perfect calmness, making not the slightest effort toward escape.

"By yer name."

"And what name is that?"

"Doesn't yer know yer own cognomen, pard?"

"I do."

"Waal, why does yer ask me ter baptize yer?"

"Loosen that rope so as not to strangle my horse, and I'll tell you."

"All right; it are drawin' close— There, now yer confesses yerself tuk in slick, don't yer, Buffalo Bill?"

The scout laughed.

"Does yer see anything funny in being caught?"

"Yes."

"Waal, yer has grit, all ther grit thet men says yer has, if yer kin amuse yerself with a rope around yer neck, when it's likely ther other end will be soon over a tree limb and you a-dancin' a jig ter slow music six feet above ther ground."

Again the scout laughed, and the four men looked at each other in amazement, combined with silent admiration at his great nerve.

"Say, pard, hain't yer goin' ter let us inter the joke? I likes fun, I does."

"It is a good joke, Number Two."

"Lordy! who told you my name, or rather number?"

"Is yer onter our rackit already?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then yer is as sart'in ter hang as can be."

"I am not so sure of that; but, as I am getting tired of this nonsense, I'll just tell you that you are Captain Brimstone's men, who are known as the Brimstone Boys or Brotherhood, just as suits you best."

"Boys, he's educated too knowin', and he hev raseled with death awful suddint."

"Number Two, you are all wrong, for you have taken me for Buffalo Bill, the Scout."

"And you is."

"Oh, no; though I admit there is a striking resemblance between the scout and myself."

"Pard, yer can't play no marked keards on us, for you is Buff'ler Bill, and no mistake."

Again the scout laughed and said:

"I tell you it is a case of mistaken identity."

"Nary."

"If I was Buffalo Bill, how would I know your number?"

"Waal, seein' it are on ther front o' my mask, and yer kin read, it are easy ter answer."

"I tell you that you belong to Brimstone's band, and I am on my way to the rendezvous now."

"Is thar soldiers ter back you?"

And there was an uneasy movement among the four men.

"I am not a soldier, I again tell you."

"You is Buffalo Bill."

"Why do you persist in saying I am ther scout, when I have told you that I was not?"

"Who in thunder be yer, then?"

"Have you ever heard of the Deserter Sergeant?"

"I has."

"And I has seen him," added Number Four.

"Have you not heard that he resembles Buffalo Bill?"

"I has," said Number Four, and he continued:

"He do, too."

"You know that the Deserter Sergeant went to the mines, if you know anything about him, and that he is under sentence of death for murder, desertion and other acts?"

"So I have heard," Number Two remarked.

"Well, if any of you have ever seen Brick Benson, the Deserter Sergeant, you should know that I am that man."

"He do look like ther sergeant, pards, powerful like him, fer I played some games with him onst, and he jist tuk my whole pile, too."

"Does yer recommender me, pard?" asked Number Three.

"How can I tell, as you are masked?"

"Thet are so."

"Remove your mask and I will tell you."

"No yer don't, for it are ag'in' orders in our lay-out ter know each other."

"Well, as for myself, I do not care who sees my face or knows me, though I would rather not disobey orders."

"Still, you caught me on my way to the rendezvous and before I could put my mask on."

"As you have seen me now, it's no use hiding; but see, let me introduce myself, pards, as Number One," and as the scout spoke he took from his pocket the mask which he had gotten from Brick Benson, and put it on.

"Pard, yer is right, and we is wrong, so we gives up ther game," said Number Two.

"I told you it was a case of mistaken identity, so now remove these lariats, please, and we'll go on for the rendezvous together, for I suppose the captain is there?"

"Yas, he is thar, and he are expectin' yer."

"Expecting me?"

"Waal, yas, for he said he had sent Number One off on a leetle matter o' important biz, and were a trifle anxious about him, so he'll be glad ter see yer."

The lariats were now removed from the scout's neck and body, and the whole party rode back on the trail, Buffalo Bill now masked and busy with his thoughts of how many times more in life would Good Fortune be his friend in cases of need.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DREADED FOE.

BUFFALO BILL had surmised correctly, when he saw Snow Face slip away from his cabin, and with an Indian head-dress and blanket thrown over him, make his way to the nearest of the villages in the valley, while he pretended to be indoors writing a letter for him, as the pretended Deserter Sergeant, to carry back to Captain Brimstone.

Snow Face had great confidence in his under chief, Cut Nose, and so picked him out for the work in hand, which was no more or less than to kill the messenger from an ambush.

He had told him to go to the spot, where he knew there was a perfect hiding-place, and take with him a brave whom he could depend upon.

Then, as the scout, or rather, supposed deserter, came along, to kill him and bring his body back to the cabin for him to search.

Cut Nose was only too happy to carry out his orders, and had selected his truest brave.

But the result is known, and it remains to tell of how Snow Face heard the news of his warriors' end.

He had intended making Cut Nose the bearer of his letter to Captain Brimstone, telling the outlaw leader that his messenger had unfortunately lost his life by falling over a precipice.

But he sprung to his feet with more show of excitement than was his wont when the party he had sent out to see what had become of Cut Nose returned, bearing the bodies of the two Indians, and the "talking paper," as the redskins called the note left by the scout.

He read it through, and he at once saw that it was best to do as the writer suggested, and not allow the redskins to know that one who was a member of the outlaw band, who were to be the allies of the Sioux, had been guilty of killing two of his warriors.

It would not do to let this be known, and as Cut Nose and the brave who accompanied him alone knew that he, Snow Face, had sent them to kill the messenger, it could be arranged so as to cast no suspicion upon him.

Upon the contrary, the cunning Snow Face intended to let the outlaw allies benefit by the act of the Deserter Sergeant.

"So he at once summoned all of the head chiefs to his cabin and appeared before them with the slip of paper in his hand.

This he pretended to read to them, and his version was that the messenger, a brave white chief, had found foes coming to the Indian village, and had aided Cut Nose and the brave to beat them off.

Cutnose had been slain, also the warrior with him, but the enemy had retreated, and he had

written to him, Snow Face, the story of the affair.

The chiefs were in an angry humor.

Redskins are always fiercely angry when one of their number has been killed in battle; but the idea of doubting the great white chief never for a moment entered the head of any of those present.

Instead, they felt glad to have so brave a friend as the outlawed Deserter Sergeant, and were happy in having allies such as the Brimstone Brotherhood would be, especially as they would share their plunder with them.

Having dismissed his chiefs, after giving orders to send a scouting-party ahead the next day to make or complete the circuit of the village, merely as a blind, however, Snow Face sought the room where his wife awaited him.

"You have heard, Irma?" he said, assuringly.

"Yes, I listened," said the woman, who understood the Sioux tongue well.

"That messenger was dangerous, it seems."

"He looked it."

"Cut Nose was my best chief, and the brave with him was also a picked warrior."

"Yet the deserter killed both."

"So it seems."

"And will betray my presence here?"

"No; at least, see what his letter says."

The woman took the letter and read it through without comment until she had finished it.

Then she said:

"I will trust him."

"We can do nothing else, until—"

"Until what?"

"Well, there is but one thing for me to do, Irma."

"And that is, chief?"

"Kill Edmund Allyn."

There was something in the tone, as well as the words uttered, that caused the woman to start and say, quickly:

"Can you mean it?"

"I do."

"You seem to forget."

"I forget nothing."

"You certainly forget the past, and that he saved you from being hanged."

"Could I forget that?"

"You appear to have done so when you threaten to kill him."

"He is my most dreaded foe."

"He has cause to be."

"Hah! you defend him?"

"Oh, no: I merely tell you the truth, and I would not wish to see you kill that man of all others."

"But I must."

"Why?"

"He will know of your presence here."

"How can he, if I go into hiding, should he come here, and you have but to instruct your warriors to allow no one to come here until you have first gone to the post to see them."

"In that time I can hide, should you bring him on here."

"Your being here might be kept from him, Irma, but for that man."

"The deserter?"

"Yes."

"You feel that he will betray you?"

"I feel sure of it."

"I do not."

"Well, I can tell, when I meet Brimstone, as meet him I suppose I must before long, and if he shows that he suspects that you are here then he dies at once!"

"You will have your way, I suppose, Douglas, but I believe your downfall will begin from the day you take Edmund Allyn's life."

"My downfall! Good God! am I not a renegade to my own race?"

"Could I sink lower?" the man said, with mingled bitterness and ferocity.

"Yes, you could lose your life in the way you dread."

The man shuddered, and the woman continued in a low, thoughtful tone:

"Now, you are a fugitive from justice, it is true, a renegade, and yet you have a thousand brave warriors to protect you, and your raids upon the mines, with your braves at your back, are enriching you."

"Through Allyn you are to obtain more, and we can fly from here, when your wealth equals your hopes, and there are other lands where we can dwell in luxury, unknown to any one."

"But if you add to your crimes the life of Edmund Allyn, then I believe you seal your doom with his death."

"Think of this, Douglas."

Her words had made a deep impression upon the man, for he said, hoarsely:

"Let him live, then."

"You say this?"

"Yes, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"He knows you are here—then he shall die!" was the fierce rejoinder.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ALONE.

CHEEKY, the remaining captor, or rather kidnapper, of Kate Kennerley, was a man who deserved his name.

When headed off at the ford by the man he

believed far back in the rear, and wounded, while his horse was dead, he was nonplused decidedly, and the quick and awful fate of his companion, Brass, was a terrible shock to him.

He saw but one course to pursue, for a retreat meant death, and so he surrendered at discretion, as has been seen.

As he neared the shore he was under the rifle of the young officer, and yet his brain was busy plotting an escape.

He knew the ford well, having often crossed there before, and he saw a shadow of hope, he thought.

It was at least worth a risk, and he took it, for he said quickly:

"Halt, miss, for thar is danger ther way you goes," and aloud he called out:

"Say, cap'n, ther lariat are tied to ther lady and her horse, and ter me, so I'd jist better let 'em loose, as it are dangerous."

"First give to that lady your belt of arms!" came the stern response.

With a sigh the man halted the horses, and, unbuckling his belt, handed it over, and Kate placed it upon the horn of her saddle.

"Your rifle, too, sir!" came the stern command, and the weapon was unslung and also passed over.

"Now guide that lady in safety, or I will pull trigger on you."

"And that means suddint death," muttered Cheeky, as he rode to the side of Kate and caught hold of her bridle-rein.

Then they moved on along the narrow ridge of rock, which formed the ford across the river.

At last the horses were within a few yards of the shore, when suddenly the animal ridden by Kate Kennerley lost his footing.

It was the act of the outlaw, though it seemed not to be; but he knew that the ridge there was barely wide enough for one horse, and he kept his upon it, while a movement of his hand upon the rein threw Kate's horse off.

The sudden plunge, then the rearing of the animal, unseated the maiden, and she was thrown into the swift-flowing stream, while the outlaw, to prevent his own horse being dragged off the ridge, let go the rein, and away went the struggling steed toward the falls, in hot pursuit of his fair rider.

In an instant had Fred Forrester taken in the situation, and dashing down his rifle he sprang upon the rocks and plunged in.

Almost before Kate had gone twenty feet he rose by her side, and an arm was about her slender waist, while he struck out boldly for the steep bank.

He knew his danger well, for if he swept by the point near him, the bank was too steep to gain a footing, and both would be hurled over the falls to certain death.

With Herculean efforts he reached the point, grasped an overhanging limb, and held on, though it threatened to break loose, and Kate also seizing it, held on, while he reached the bank and drew her out.

It had taken hardly a minute, but in that time Cheeky had gained the bank also, and the clatter of his horse's hoofs was heard going through the timber.

He had the chance to escape, and made good use of it, not seeming to realize that he could be master of the situation did he seize the weapons thrown aside by the young officer.

But ere he had gone a couple of hundred yards the thought flashed upon him that he had been too anxious to get away and was unarmed, and wheeling his horse he rode back.

He did not know whether the officer had rescued the maiden, and escaped death himself, but he rather thought, from his bold plunge and splendid swimming that he had, and it struck him that he had best go slow.

This thought flashed upon him just in time to save his life, for he suddenly beheld in the gathering twilight the lieutenant running for his weapons, and turning his horse hesped away like the wind, followed, however, by a few shots sent flying after him at random.

"We are dismounted, Miss Kennerley, but I have my arms," said Fred Forrester, as he turned to the maiden, who just then approached him, her riding-habit dripping wet and clinging about her exquisite form as she walked.

She stepped up close to him and placed her hand on his as he held his rifle, which he had just discharged at the fleeing outlaw.

"Lieutenant Forrester, you know all that I owe to you, so why need I tell you how I appreciate your noble sacrifice for me?"

"Will you not believe that my heart is full of gratitude to you for it?"

"I gave you warning of danger, Miss Kennerley, and for your sake regret that you did not follow it, for it places you in an unfortunate position, drenched as you are, and eight miles from the fort."

His words seemed to ignore her gratitude and look to the present, not the past.

"It might have been far worse, sir, had those men carried me off, and death in yonder fall, had you not bravely risked your life to save mine."

"I am happy in having done a good act to atone for my past," he said, bitterly, and then quickly added:

"But let us decide what is to be done."

"The fort is eight miles away?"

"Yes."

"I cannot walk there, for my horse struck my ankle with his hoof and I am really lame."

"I am sorry; but, do you dare remain here alone?"

"Yes."

"I will see first if I can find my runaway horse, and if not, will take this lariat, which that man dropped, and make you a swing to sit in, upon yonder limb, where no wolf can reach you, and let you have one of my revolvers, while I cross the river and hasten to the fort."

"I will remain, sir; but first see, please, if you can find my horse."

And Kate shuddered as she glanced about her at the deepening shadows.

Fred Forrester hastened away, but his search was fruitless, though he found his *serape*, which had fallen from his saddle.

With this, the lariat and some boughs, he then made a secure swing upon a limb which was some seven feet from the ground, and placing Kate in it he drew her up and made the rope fast.

"You are in no danger from wolves, and no one passing would see you here, Miss Kennerley, so have no fear."

"Here is a revolver as company, and good company it is, too; and I am a good walker, so will be back within three hours."

"Good-night! and do not lose your nerve."

"Good-night!"

And she held forth her hand.

Lightly touching it, he dropped from the limb to the ground, and watching him she saw his tall form disappear, heard him enter the river at the ford, and then silence followed, broken only by the howling of a wolf now and then, and the roaring of the swiftly flowing river as it tumbled over the falls.

"I am utterly alone here in this wilderness," she murmured.

And the thought was one to appal a braver heart than hers.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TO HER RESCUE.

FRED FORRESTER felt the full responsibility upon him of going to the rescue of Kate Kennerley, and leaving her alone to await his coming back.

To one reared as she had been, to find herself alone in a howling wilderness, with Indians roaming about, her kidnapper perhaps not far away, and the forests echoing to the dismal howl of the wolf, he knew must be appalling.

He had arranged the lariat swing, or rather seat as well as possible, for with the boughs and *serape* he had made a comfortable nest of it.

She was wet through, but the *serape* would keep her from a chill, and she was high enough from the ground to escape the wolves.

Then, too, he had left her a revolver, and he was determined not to be gone longer than was absolutely necessary.

Crossing the river at the ford, and holding his rifle above his head, he reached the other shore, and started off at a swinging trot which he knew would carry him four miles an hour, if not more, over the uneven ground.

He was a perfect athlete, and yet had not fully recovered his former strength, after the wound he had received; but he held on bravely, and at last the distant lights of the fort came in sight.

He was tired, after his long ride, then swim for life, afterward struggle through the swift waters in crossing the ford, and eight-mile run; but he did not think of self, only that lone girl in the forest behind him.

His wet clothes made the weight to carry considerable, and he had his rifle also and heavy cavalry boots.

At last he was halted by the sentinel, but readily gave the countersign and entered.

He was gazed at curiously as he entered the headquarters, for there were quite a number of officers and ladies there, all discussing the absence of the lieutenant and non-return of the beautiful girl who had now become the very idol of the fort.

Unheeding all, Fred Forrester walked up to the general, who arose quickly as he saw him, and he gazed at the haggard face, wet, mud-stained uniform and hatless officer, for he had lost his fatigue cap when he sprang to the rescue of Kate in the river.

"Pardon me, General Carr, but I wish to report my unavoidable absence from parade, sir, as I was detained by the attempt to rescue Miss Kennerley from kidnappers."

"She is now eight miles from here, sir, across the river and alone in the timber, and I beg leave to return with a squad of my men for her, sir, as her situation is decidedly unpleasant and unfortunate."

Such was the modest report of the young officer.

Several, in their excitement, forgetting that they had "cut" him, now spoke, eagerly asking questions, but the cool stare they got in return checked their enthusiasm.

"This is startling news you bring, Mr. For-

rester, and of course your excuse is sufficient to account for your absence without leave," said General Carr, in kindly tones, for he saw that the officer was really suffering.

"I will, general, with your permission, at once go to the rescue of Miss Kennerley," said Burke Blackford, whose wealth and aristocratic family caused him to put on airs with all at the fort who would tolerate it, and, admired by the ladies, and toadied by some of the officers, he was considered a privileged character.

"As I understand Mr. Forrester, sir, Miss Kennerley has already been rescued, and Lieutenant Forrester has asked to go after her, though, as he seems to be suffering, I would be glad if he would allow some officer to take his place."

"Is Surgeon Powell here?" and Forrester glanced about him.

"No; Powell, with Texas Jack, left at sunset on the trail of Miss Kennerley, when she failed to appear," replied the general.

"Then I understand that you wish me to go, general?" said Blackford, eagerly.

"No, sir, you understand no such thing, for it rests with Mr. Forrester."

"I am only fatigued, sir, so can return; but I thought if Surgeon Powell were here he could go," and then came the words, and look directly at Burke Blackford, "for he is a man of undoubted courage, and has the good sense to find her by my direction."

Burke Blackford's face flushed, and some laughed—those who did not like him; but with a salute Fred Forrester wheeled on his heel and left the room.

He at once ordered a dozen of his men to mount for the trail, and, without changing his wet clothing, mounted another horse he owned, and, with a led animal saddled for Kate, started on his return to relieve her from her desolate position, while all at the fort, expecting her return within a couple of hours, determined to sit up and await her coming, while they discussed the pros and cons of the case, and wondered at her strange adventure, and how it happened that the man who was looked upon as having defrauded her of five thousand dollars was so conveniently near to rescue her from kidnappers.

Upon reaching the river, the gallant lieutenant led the way across, the men following in Indian file, and, as they neared the other bank, suddenly there rung out from up in the foliage of the trees a pistol-shot, followed by the wild yells of red-skins.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TWO TRAILERS.

WHEN it became known at the fort that Miss Kennerley, who had ridden out alone on the prairie sketching, had not returned, and that Lieutenant Forrester had not appeared at dress parade, and could nowhere be found, Surgeon Powell at once went over to the quarters of the scouts.

"Where is Texas Jack?" he asked one of the scouts whom he met.

"In his quarters, sir; shall I call him?" answered the man, politely, for outside of being an officer demanding respect, Frank Powell was popular with every one in the fort.

"No, thank you, I'll go there," and soon after the surgeon entered the quarters of the Texan scout, who was next to Buffalo Bill in rank.

"Ah, Surgeon Powell, come in, sir," said the scout, a handsome, well-formed young man, with a bright, piercing eye and long, waving hair.

"Jack, I called to ask you to go on a scout with me."

"Yes, doctor, I am ready, sir."

"Buffalo Bill is away, and news has just come in that Miss Kennerley left the fort alone and has not returned, and Indians are known to be about."

"So I have reported, sir, to the general."

"Then Lieutenant Forrester left the fort today and has not come back, so I wish to see if we cannot be on hand at dawn to discover what harm has befallen them."

"I am ready, Surgeon Powell."

"Well, get ready and I will soon join you and we will go to the Twin Cottonwoods, where Miss Kennerley is said to have gone, and my idea is that Forrester sought to protect her and got into trouble himself."

"Doubtless so, sir, and, poor fellow! he seems anxious to atone for the cloud upon him."

"But I'll be ready, Surgeon Powell," answered Texas Jack, and he set to work preparing for the trail, while Frank Powell sought the quarters of General Carr and told him of his and Texas Jack's desire to take the trail.

"All right, Powell, I am glad to see you do so, for I believe that Forrester went to have an eye on Miss Kennerley, whom he warned not to go, Mrs. Denton tells me."

So Surgeon Frank Powell and Texas Jack mounted their horses and started off in the darkness.

"Which way, doctor?" asked the scout, as the two left the fort behind them.

"To the Twin Cottonwoods, for we may be able to make some discovery to-night, and if

not, we will be on hand at the first peep of day."

The glen was reached, and cautiously approached, and Surgeon Powell picked up a handkerchief, which he at once said was Miss Kennerley's.

It was a small one, with initials embroidered in one corner, and striking a match, he saw the letters:

"K. K."

"She was here, Jack."

"Yes, sir, we are right to begin with," was the reply of the scout, and, staking out their horses, they spread their blankets near by and sought rest.

It was not dawn when they awoke; but by the time that they had eaten their breakfast and had their horses saddled, the light was bright enough for them to see the marks upon the ground.

Then both men set to work with the skill of perfect trailers, one in one direction, the other in another.

They worked silently, first in a circle, then nearing the spot where the handkerchief had been found, until they both met at the spot where Kate Kennerley had been surprised by Cheeky.

"Well, Jack?"

"She came from the fort, doctor, and set to work right there—see, there are the marks of her easel, and here is her camp-stool."

"I see; and then?"

"A horseman rode from the ridge yonder, left his horse behind that thicket, and came on foot to this spot and surprised her."

"I guess it was the lieutenant, sir, as he was alone, and she packed up her traps, mounted and rode away with him back toward the ridge."

"All right, Jack, except that it was not Forrester who joined her."

"Who then?"

"I know the track of Forrester's horse, and his trail comes over yonder hill, and down yonder is where he fell heavily, and there is a blood-stain on the ground; but he is not there, so must have been but slightly wounded, for the trail turns off squarely to the river, and ends there, so that he swam across."

"It is a dangerous place to make the swim, doctor."

"True, but Forrester is a bold fellow; but this proves I was right, as to the lieutenant having been here, and now we will strike your trail and follow it."

This they did, and, reading the signs with the skill of experts, they soon discovered that another horseman had come from the ridge and met the two going up, and then all three had held along the river-bank toward the ford some six miles above.

At a canter they held on the now broadly-seen trail until the fork was reached, and here was discovered another trail.

It was made by a number of horses, going and coming a search revealed, and both came and went in the direction of the fort.

"Jack, soldiers have passed here."

"Yes, sir, and returned."

"The tracks show that they were the same party."

"Yes, sir; and the trail was made in the night."

"And leads across the river."

"Yes, doctor, but I never knew this ford to be attempted at night, for one has to see to keep on the rock ridge, and a mistake is pretty sure to end with a trip over the falls."

"Well, as both trails, going and coming, were made in the night, we will cross and see where they lead to."

And Surgeon Powell plunged in, the scout following.

"My idea is," continued the Surgeon Scout, calling back to Texas Jack, "that, as Forrester crossed the river he cut off the bend, returned to the fort after we left, and got a force to pursue whoever were the captors of Miss Kennerley."

"It looks so, doctor, and the captors were white men, for they did not seem to behave as Indians, from their trails."

They had now gotten across to the other shore, and in a few minutes the two drew rein, while Texas Jack said, as he gazed about him:

"There has been music here, Surgeon Powell."

"Yes, Jack."

And the two men began to read the signs, which consisted of a couple of dead troop horses here, several Indian ponies scattered here and there, and some rudely-made graves, six in number, over under a tree.

"Jack, this trail was made by Indians, and they were flying, and this other by the troopers on their return to the fort, so we can but go back and see what has been done, and not act in the dark."

"Yes, sir," was the response of Texas Jack, who pointed to the trail and said: "Doctor, there is the trail of Lieutenant Forrester's horse, and he did swim the river and come here."

"Yes; and I believe he brought the troopers

here, and I only hope they rescued Miss Kennerley."

"That is certain."

"Why?"

"They do not follow the red-skin trail, which would be the case if they had not rescued her."

"You are right, Jack, for Forrester would have camped on the trail until dawn, and then followed."

An hour later they were at the fort, and General Carr listened to their report with great interest, and then asked:

"Has any one told you what happened, Surgeon Powell?"

"No, sir."

"Nor you, Jack?"

"No, sir."

"Then you are both remarkable trailers, for you have read the signs like an open book," was the response of General Carr, whose admiration was great at the "sign reading" of the surgeon and the scout.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WOMAN'S NERVE.

WHEN Kate Kennerley was left alone in the forest by Fred Forrester, she was at first quite brave, and determined to keep up a stout heart.

"It will only be for a few hours, and I am safe up here," she muttered to herself.

Then she fell to admiring her very comfortable swing, made for her by the officer, and she saw that it was too high up for a wolf to reach her by springing into the air.

Then she had hardly been cheered by this reflection before she began to dread bears.

"A bear could climb the tree and come out upon the limb," she said with a feeling of renewed dread.

She saw, however, in the darkness though it was, that the tree and limb where she was, would not uphold the weight of a bear, and again she was cheered.

But her next trouble was to recall the fact that panthers and wildcats were smaller and more active than bears, and one of these animals might take a fancy to pay her a visit.

"I would hear them, and see their eyes, and could kill them," she decided.

So she was again cheered, and only wished that she knew how long the lieutenant had been gone.

She had heard him plunge into the river, after which silence had come upon her, and yet a silence that was not stillness.

It was a silence of nature that was broken by the roar of the falls, and the yelping of a coyote.

She did not find her swinging seat uncomfortable, for it was, on the contrary, quite comfortable, and certainly safe.

She could lean back in it and rest.

But then, her riding-habit was wet, she was wet through her clothing by her plunge into the river, and began to feel cold.

Then she drew the *serape* about her and felt a trifle warmer; but it did not prevent her from feeling chilly.

Then she moved her position and awoke to the consciousness that her ankle pained her.

Her horse in his struggle had struck her a blow on her ankle with his hoof, and it was becoming really painful.

But for this she would have risked the crossing of the ford and the long tramp to the fort.

It was true that Lieutenant Forrester had offered to carry her, telling her that though slow work, he could get her to the fort by morning, and it would prevent her from being left alone; but this she had firmly refused to permit, and had chosen to wait in the tree until his return.

An hour and a half thus passed, and it seemed an age to the shivering, anxious, terrified girl, and she was about to give way to her feelings in a burst of tears when she heard the fall of horses' hoofs.

"Why, he is coming! how short a while he has been gone," she cried, as she now realized that the time had not been long in reality, only in her dread anxiety.

She saw then some shadowy forms appear in sight, and she was about to call them when suddenly she remembered that they had not come across the river.

They had come up the river, along the bank which she was on.

Who could they be, she wondered.

Straight to where she was they came, riding in Indian file, and silent.

She held her breath in awe, and, as with a low command from the leader, they halted, her heart seemed to fairly cease to beat.

The words were uttered in guttural tones and in a language unknown to her.

Then she knew who they were.

"They are Sioux," came from between her teeth.

And watching the forms, looking like shadowy phantoms in the darkness, she saw them move about, stake out their horses and go into camp.

Two scouts had gone off, as though to reconnoiter, or stand as sentinels, and the balance, two-score in number, had gone into camp.

They were not a hundred and fifty feet from

her, and she saw them gather wood and light a fire.

As the flames brightened, it revealed them in all their horror.

They were savages on the war-path, painted, feathered and armed for the fray.

They built two fires and began to cook their supper of game, looking like devils in the fire-light glare.

She was not seen, and it was unlikely that she would be, unless they remained in camp until after dawn.

Still the thought was appalling, and it was only by the strongest effort she could restrain from crying out in her despair.

Her nerves had been severely taxed by her having been kidnapped, her rescue, and the narrow escape from death she had made in the river, and she was unnerved almost.

Then came to her the terrible thought of Lieutenant Forrester's return.

He might bring but a few men with him and dash right into the midst of the red-skins, for he would hardly be aware of their presence there.

This would end in his death and that of the troopers, she was certain.

They would hear him coming, their fires, after supper, would die out, and they could ambush him.

With these thoughts in her mind, her courage rose, for she was anxious to be able to save the officer and his men.

The wolves, bears and wildcats were dismissed without more thought, and the chilly feeling had left her.

She nerved herself to save Forrester and his men from being caught in a trap.

She clutched the revolvers he had left with her, and waited.

The red-skins ate heartily of their supper of game, smoked their pipes, and one by one went off and rolled themselves in their blankets.

She noted two of them walk off, and then the couple who had done sentinel duty came to get their supper, showing that they were not far away.

This Kate was glad to see, as she feared the guards might discover the coming soldiers a long way off, and thus give ample warning, so that an ambush could be formed.

Soon the camp was as silent as the grave.

The two red-skin sentinels had returned to their posts, and two-score Indian warriors were wrapped in their blankets and sleeping within three hundred feet of the brave girl, whose eyes were wide open, peering through the darkness upon them, or rather where she had seen them show themselves to seek repose.

Thus the minutes dragged along until the straining ears of the beautiful watcher caught the clank of steel against steel.

"They are coming," she said, and as to prove that she was not mistaken, the two sentinels glided like black phantoms into the camp.

They too had heard the sound and came to give warning of a foe near.

A few low words aroused the Indians, and silently and quickly they saddled their ponies and stood ready to meet an attack, or rather to give a surprise.

The tramp of the troopers' horses were now heard, and the red-skins were ranged across the ford trail in the timber.

They were dismounted, but hitched behind them were their ponies.

The plunge of the coming troopers into the river was heard, and then came an order from their chief.

He intended to rush forward and shoot them down at the ford.

As each red-skin moved forward in a line, dodging as was their wont, from tree to tree, Kate Kennerley knew that it was her time to act.

And she acted promptly too.

Suddenly, in the rear of the red-skins rung out a sharp report.

They were horrified and uttered wild yells.

They supposed that they had been flanked and attacked in the rear, and then followed, in quick succession, five reports, while the bullets flew through the timber.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SHADOWS DEEPEN.

LIEUTENANT FRED FORRESTER, and every man with him, who went to the rescue of Kate Kennerley, were forced to admit that the one whom they had gone to save had saved them.

But for the fact that Kate had opened fire with her revolvers, upon the red-skins, in their rear, they would have poured a withering volley upon the troopers, gotten them at disadvantage, by a complete surprise and being in the swift stream.

But the shots of the brave girl warned the troopers of danger, and it revealed who their foes were by causing the Indians to break forth in wild yells of mingled terror and defiance.

Coming from behind them, as the firing did, it caused the red-skins to believe that their presence there was known, that they were attacked in front and in the rear, and feeling that

the soldiers must be in force they turned and fled for their ponies.

The moment that there was a hesitancy on the part of the foe, Fred Forrester rushed on with his gallant riders, and at once a sharp fight was begun.

Believing that the foe behind them was in ambush, not having revealed themselves, the red-skins sprung upon their horses, or the first horse they came to and sped away through the timber.

Some fought, it was true, and several of the troopers were wounded, there was one killed, and two horses had gone down to rise no more.

But the Indians had been forced to leave half-a-dozen dead upon the field, and all their plunder, for they were returning from a raid.

"How different it would have been for us but for Miss Kennerley's brave act," said Forrester to his sergeant, and he spurred up to the tree where the maiden sat in her swing, awaiting the result of the short, sharp fight with intense suspense.

"Miss Kennerley, you are safe, and we owe you our lives."

"You should have a medal for your courage to-night, for those shots saved us from an ambush," and the young officer raised his hat politely and bent low.

"What trouble have I not caused by not following your advice, sir!"

"I fear I shall never forgive myself."

"The fortunes of war only, Miss Kennerley, and you have helped us to punish the red-skins and retake a large amount of booty they had taken, with some horses, besides."

"You deserve a medal."

"I am glad you look at it so kindly, Lieutenant Forrester: but I owe you my warmest gratitude for all you have done for me to-night."

"Will you help me down, please, for I am oh, so willing to return to the fort."

He unfastened the lariat-end from about the tree and lowered the swing, and a moment after had raised her to the saddle of the horse he had brought.

Leaving the sergeant and his men to look after the wounded and bury the dead Indians, he called to one soldier to accompany him, and rode to the fort, saying that he would send help at once.

Kate Kennerley rode by his side, and she was strangely silent, for her thoughts were busy.

Would not this gallant act of the ostracized lieutenant remove the cloud from upon him? she wondered.

At last the fort was reached, and the officer carried her directly to the quarters of the major, where a crowd were assembled to greet her.

Her toilet was certainly not prepossessing after all she had gone through, but she looked very beautiful still, and Mrs. Denton and others greeted her most warmly, while General Carr said:

"Welcome back, my fair heroine, for certainly you have won the title of one after to-night's adventure."

"Thank you, general, but Lieutenant Forrester is the hero, as you will know when I tell you all that he has done; but, will I ever be forgiven for this terrible trouble I have caused you all?"

"You are forgiven beforehand, I assure you; but tell us of the affair, for that silent Forrester merely reported that he had run upon some red-skins, and your pluck saved him and his men from an ambush."

Then Kate told her story just as it all had occurred, and instead of praise for the hero only unkind remarks were made, for the wife of a captain said:

"I wonder if they were really Indians, and if the gallant lieutenant did not arrange the affair to play the hero and thus cancel his debt to you, Miss Kennerley?"

A silence fell upon all, and General Carr bit his lips with anger, while he seemed about to speak and then checked himself.

Major Denton also flushed an rily, and his wife was about to utter a sharp reproof, when Kate turned upon her quickly.

Her eyes flashed, and her voice quivered as she said:

"Did I not say, Mrs. Lyons, that one soldier was killed and several were wounded? Your nature must be a warped one, indeed, to make evil out of good."

The words, the manner were cutting, and Mrs. Lyons flushed and paled under them, while Mrs. Denton, feeling for her, though knowing she deserved the rebuke, said:

"Come, Kate, you are worn out and nervous, so must retire."

And she led her from the room, while Mrs. Lyons hastily slipped away, feeling that she had indeed gone too far.

But her words were spoken, and they bore fruit, for many, prejudiced already against Fred Forrester, were only too willing to still deepen the shadow upon his life, and it was not long before it seemed to be accepted by many that the young officer's daily rides alone upon the prairies had been for a purpose, and that he had been striving to cancel his indebtedness to the heiress by pretending to rescue her from capture.

The Indian affair they thought might have been a real attack; but the two kidnappers were said to have been in his pay.

And among the most loud speakers, in spreading this opinion, was Lieutenant Burke Blackford, the brother of Mrs. Lyons.

But from whatever source it came, the shadows were deepened over the head of the unfortunate lieutenant.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT THE RENDEZVOUS.

THE spot chosen by Captain Brimstone as a rendezvous for the picked men he had chosen for his outlaw band, was one well suited to those whose lives were in their hands, and whose hands were raised against honorable men.

It was in a mountain canyon, hard of access, and treble so if the trail thereto was defended by bold men.

The spot was known to the Indians as the Spirit Canyon, from some legend handed down to them, and they avoided it, and old trappers and hunters shunned the place, as they said any man who had gone there, to hunt, or sojourn, had never returned.

Once, with several miners, Captain Brimstone had invaded the mysterious canyon, and the skeleton remains of several men and horses in a deep gorge, revealed the fact that those who had gone there had gone down in a landslide into a place from which there was no escape up the steep sides.

There were also the skeleton remains of a number of wild animals, deer, bear, wolves and smaller game that had been caught in the same death-trap, and but for the sliding away of the trail around the mountain-side, before Captain Brimstone had ridden upon it, they too would have gone down into the fatal den.

The concussion of a deep clap of thunder, for a storm was approaching, shook the frail trail loose before the outlaw and his men rode upon it.

While the men were congratulating themselves upon their remarkable escape, Captain Brimstone was taking in the situation in silence for future reference.

So he called his men back, and one day went alone to the canyon, and the result was his decision to make it a rendezvous.

He flanked the dangerous landslide and entered the canyon from the other end, but determined to use the dangerous approach as a means of protection.

So a warning note was put up at the spot of peril, warning the men to come around, and the camp of the Brimstone Brotherhood was pitched in the further end of the canyon.

Here the chief awaited the arrival of his men, and especially the coming of the trusted courier, whom he had sent to visit the village of Snow Face the white renegade chief of the Sioux.

The outlaw chief had determined to play a bold game for gold.

Brick Benson had told Buffalo Bill that Captain Brimstone was none other than the elegant sport known as "Gambler Gaul," who was known along the frontier posts and in the mining-camps; but whether he was or not, the mask he wore completely hid.

He was a man of handsome physique, as he paced to and fro in the canyon, before the tent which he had brought there with him on a pack-horse.

There were other tents pitched about, for the men, for Captain Brimstone had come well prepared for a campaign.

He had brought two men with him who acted as servants, one to cook, and the other to look after his horses and individual comfort.

These had given the place a very comfortable look before the arrival of one of the outlaws.

To each of his picked men the outlaw chief had given perfect directions for reaching the place, and also told them just where they were to put their masks on.

One by one then the men began to drop in, and as they did so they were welcomed by their chief.

All came masked, and no two came together.

After a dozen had arrived, Captain Brimstone had sent Number Two and others out upon a scouting expedition, and these were the ones who had captured Buffalo Bill, and then been forced to the opinion that it was a case of mistaken identity.

When presented to the reader Captain Brimstone is pacing up and down before his tent.

He is dressed as stylishly as though for a ride on horseback in Central Park, New York.

Napoleon boots incase his feet, and a slouch hat of black, with a broad brim, is set upon his head in a rakish kind of manner.

The hat is enriched by a gold cord, and the flap is pinned up with a pin representing a torch-holder, of red, and in it a flame of blue.

Corduroy pants stuck in the boot-tops, a jacket of the same, a belt of arms, and a sash of red completed his costume, with the addition of a pair of Mexican spurs.

The men had nearly all arrived when one day a horseman appeared and reported for duty.

He was in buckskin, masked, and yet one who had seen his form and horse before would

have recognized, in spite of his mask, none other than Cheeky.

"You are Number Ten, I see," said Captain Brimstone, who knew each one of his men, though unknown to them.

"That's my name now, cap'n."

"Then about all of my men are here, except one I sent on a special mission."

"Thar's one hain't a-comin', cap'n," said Cheeky.

"Ah! how do you know that?"

"Wal, cap'n, we was pards for ever so long, and we meeted on tner way here, and I jist found out he were on ther same trail I was."

"So we plays pards once more and chipped in to capter a pretty gal from ther fort as there was money in, we thought, ef we brought her to you fer ransom."

"But a young officer as I knows ter be Lieutenant Forrester, jist sailed in and recaptured ther gal and sent my pard to ther bottom of ther stream we was a-crossing."

"What was his number?"

"Thirteen."

"Ah, yes, he went by the name of Brass in the mines; but is he dead?"

"Sart'in, cap'n."

"And you escaped?"

"I lit out, sir, leavin' ther ledly with ther officer."

"Lieutenant Forrester you say he was?"

"Yas, cap'n, and he were a dandy."

"And the lady was from Fort Fairview?"

"Yas, cap'n."

"I wonder if it could have been Miss Kennerley."

"That's ther name she told us was ther one she went by."

"Ah, you lost a prize, for she is very rich, and would have paid handsomely to be ransomed."

"But another time I will strike in that direction," and sending Cheeky to his tent, the chief turned to another party who just then rode into the canyon.

It was the four who had captured Buffalo Bill, and he was with them now, but wore a mask, and like the others, was now hidden from the eyes of his fellows.

Unheeding the four the chief sprung forward eagerly and cried:

"Ha! Number One, by all that's holy! Dis-mount and come to my tent at once."

And so it was that Buffalo Bill had entered the rendezvous of the Brimstone Brotherhood.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STARTLING RESEMBLANCE.

WHEN Buffalo Bill left the fort upon the secret trail to discover the guilt or innocence of Lieutenant Forrester it was the hope of General Carr, and of the scout also, that proof of the court-martial's just verdict could be found, and if so, that the enemies of the young officer would have to acknowledge the cruel wrong they had done him.

He had been gone for several weeks, and excepting his hasty visit to General Carr at midnight and his letter by the dumb courier, which he had named Snow Face, after his renegade master, no word had come from him.

The scouts wondered where he was, and he was missed by many at the fort.

But there were two who were most anxious regarding him, though neither had spoken to the other regarding the subject.

These two were General Carr and Surgeon Frank Powell.

Lieutenant Forrester had been on duty since his illness and the court-martial, and General Carr longed to have Buffalo Bill return with the news of his perfect innocence.

But he alone knew how great was the risk which the scout had taken to find out the truth of the affair.

With the success of Buffalo Bill's plot not only would the truth be known about Fred Forrester, but the Brimstone Brotherhood would be dealt a deadly blow, and the trail to the village of Snow Face, the renegade, be known so that a secret force could be sent to attack the village.

So it was that the general realized all that depended upon the scout, and as the days passed he would become more anxious about him.

True, Buffalo Bill had already visited Snow Face, and representing himself to be the Deserter Sergeant, had passed as such; but then there was the greater danger still of impersonating Brick Benson among men who had known him well.

He had escaped detection from the keen eyes of Snow Face; but then, had the renegade ever seen the deserter, the general wondered.

That he knew the scout well by sight, he was well aware.

So General Carr could only keep his own counsel and hope for the best until the time appointed for the scout's return came around.

The month was up the very day before Kate Kennerley's adventure, and her rescue by Fred Forrester.

General Carr saw that the jealousy of several officers, at Forrester's rescue of the beautiful heiress, had made them more bitter toward the daring young lieutenant, and he intended to

administer a severe rebuke to the offenders, the first time that an opportunity was given him by any act or word against the officer.

Kate Kennerley had told him her story the next morning, and it showed him how gallant had been the behavior of Fred Forrester, and how modest his report of the affair toward himself.

Then Surgeon Powell and Texas Jack had brought in their account of their trailing, and the most prejudiced enemy of Lieutenant Forrester could not but admit that because he was under a cloud he yet had not been guilty of trying to curry favor with the heiress, to cancel thereby his debt of five thousand dollars.

A party of cavalry had been started to pursue the trail of the Indians, from their camp in the ford, and Lieutenant Forrester had resumed his duties as adjutant.

That evening at parade, the day following the one of Kate Kennerley's kidnapping, Lieutenant Forrester's voice rung out even sharper and sterner than before.

His orders were quick, his movements perfect, and he certainly looked very handsome in his handsome uniform.

But his face was pale and stern to severity, though his eyes shone with a fire that flashed defiance into the faces of those whom he knew to be his foes.

After parade, the lieutenant went up to speak to the general, who had sent for him.

There were in the group with the general, Major Denton, Surgeon Powell, several other officers and Mrs. Denton, Kate and half a dozen ladies.

As usual, Lieutenant Blackford was haunting the side of Kate Kennerley, and, as Forrester approached, said with a sneer:

"Ah! does the exiled lieutenant intend to break his rule by joining ladies and gentlemen?"

Kate turned and saw Fred Forrester approaching, and at once replied:

"I hope so indeed," and she bowed in a marked way to Forrester, as the general stepped forward and said, at the same time offering his hand:

"Forrester, I received your request, and acquiesced in it, that I would not have you read a special order complimenting you before the command for your gallant rescue of Miss Kennerley, but I desire to say here, before my friends, that I have reported your conduct to the Department commander, and personally thank you."

The tone and manner of the general was so marked that even Burke Blackford failed to sneer.

He knew how far to go, just, and he was quiet, for he had caught the general's eye upon him.

"And I, too, Forrester, wish to thank you, and it is my pleasure to tell you that by the promotion of your captain to the division staff, you are now the captain of your company."

And Major Denton grasped the hand of the officer, whose face crimsoned and then turned white again.

"Accept my congratulations, Captain Forrester," said Mrs. Denton, with a smile.

"And may I offer mine, and say that your promotion would have been deserved if only for your gallant rescue of me."

Something very like an oath sprung from Lieutenant Blackford's lips as he heard Kate Kennerley's warmly spoken words, for he muttered:

"Bah! I am a fool to suspect a woman can love a man who owes her money."

"By Jove! but I'll raise myself a peg in her regard."

"I'll do it."

And, just as Surgeon Powell released the hand of the promoted officer in offering his congratulations, Burke Blackford stepped forward and said:

"I say, Forrester, I must say you are young for a captain, but of course I am delighted and—"

He stopped suddenly, for the eyes of Fred Forrester met his own, and stern and distinct came the words:

"Lieutenant Blackford, at heart you are not sincere, and you are forcing your lips to utter what you do not feel, so pardon me if I refuse your hand."

Had an Indian arrow come flying over the stockade wall and struck in the midst of the group it would not have created a greater sensation than did the words of the young officer.

General Carr turned hastily away, as though he had not heard what was said, while blunt old Major Denton said, in his abrupt way:

"Dead center, that shot, eh, Blackford?"

What would have been the result then and there no one knows, for suddenly Billy Blew, the Boy Bugler, stepped forward with a salute and addressed Major Denton.

The eyes of Fred Forrester fell full upon his face, and the two looked straight at each other.

It was the first time that Fred Forrester had really had a good look at the Boy Bugler, and now, with a cry that seemed wrung from his heart, and with utter indifference to those who

ent, he sprung forward, grasped the youth by the shoulder and said, hoarsely, almost fiercely: "Boy, who are you? Speak! who are you, I ask?"

"Billie Blew, sir, the Boy Bugler of your own regiment," was the calm reply.

"My God! what a resemblance!" and without a word more the newly-appointed captain turned upon his heel and with a face that had turned to the hue of a corpse, walked away like one who moved mechanically.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HOME OF THE "OUTCAST OFFICER."

AFTER his strange exhibition of feeling, which no one could account for, when he beheld the Boy Bugler, Fred Forrester walked at once to his quarters.

Lieutenant Burke Blackford almost forgot the words addressed to him, in his joy at discovering that Forrester had been made to feel deeply, from some cause or other, which the sight of Billie Blew had brought up.

But there was one present who had noticed what others had failed to observe.

That one was Kate Kennerley, and her eyes had seen a strange look upon the Boy Bugler's face when Forrester had asked the question he did, and shown the feeling the sight of the youth caused an exhibition of.

On account of his handsome face and graceful form, added to his cheery manner and wonderful musical talent, Billie Blew had become a general favorite with all, and especially with the officers' families.

On several occasions Kate had talked with him, and had heard him tell the story of her uncle's death, and of the night of the coming of Fred Forrester to the rescue.

He too had corroborated what had been said by several of the men; that Captain Kennerley seemed to have had some reason for doubting Forrester, and so had extracted from him a pledge to deliver the five thousand dollars, and papers, to his ward and niece, and the other money to the fort paymaster.

Somehow Billie Blew had impressed Kate with the idea that he seemed to like to tell the story reflecting upon the honor of the lieutenant, and the expression which she saw on his face when Fred Forrester had seen him on the parade-ground convinced her that she was right.

The bugler had told her that he had not spoken a word to Lieutenant Forrester since coming to the fort, and yet, as she saw a smile, strangely like one of triumph, and in which she read an expression of venom, sweep over the youth's face, she mused to herself:

"Those two have met before, and the boy holds some secret against the lieutenant, I am sure."

The surprise felt by all was taken advantage of by Burke Blackford, who said in his drawling way:

"My boy, how is it you frightened the captain so, for he turned livid and looked positively scared—did he not, Miss Kennerley?"

"Never having seen fright on a man's face, Lieutenant Blackford, I am not one to appeal to; but the expression I observed seemed one of surprise and pain."

"I read it differently, so, my boy, tell me how it is that you frightened the captain so."

"I do not know, sir."

"Have you ever met him before?"

"In the fort, yes, sir, though he has not appeared to notice me before."

"Perhaps it was from your resemblance to some one whom he remembers with pain and regret, and if so we have no right to pry into Mr. Forrester's affairs."

"Come, Kate, shall we return home?" and Mrs. Denton settled the question very decidedly, and the words prevented further discussion, so the group separated.

Surgeon Powell had been a silent, but attentive observer of all that had happened, and so he made his way toward the newly-promoted officer's quarters.

He was glad of Forrester's promotion, especially so at the time, as he knew that he had been made to suffer deeply.

But then, the young officer had distinguished himself on several occasions, and his superiors had recommended him for promotion, while it was given up that he was the best soldier in the regiment, and, having graduated at the head of his class stood well with the War Department.

The promotion of his captain to the staff gave the chance of his advancement, as senior lieutenant of the company, and it had been a pleasure to Surgeon Powell when Major Denton had told Forrester of his good fortune.

When the little scene occurred with Billie Blew, Surgeon Frank Powell had taken it that the boy's face had recalled some startling and unhappy memory in the past of Fred Forrester.

But when he saw the look on the bugler's face, a smile that seemed to him really devilish in its expression, he came to the conclusion that the two had met before, and that it was the youth himself, and not a resemblance, that caused the officer to show the exhibition of feeling he had given way to.

So to the quarters of Fred Forrester he went.

ed his steps, and stepped upon the little piazza, just as the sun's last rays were dying out in the western horizon.

The quarters of Forrester were really those of his captain, who had been absent on special duty for some time, and they were apart from the others and very pleasantly situated on a rise, which commanded a view beyond the stockade.

There were four rooms in the little log cottage, and Forrester had indulged in the luxury of a piano, which he had had brought over the plains in an ambulance.

Besides the piano, there were other musical instruments—a guitar, flute, violin and cornet, all of which the officer played well, for he possessed rare musical skill.

Then, too, his walls were filled with paintings and sketches of his own, some of them bits of border scenery, others likenesses of friends, and one a well-executed work of his company standing at parade rest, every face being a likeness.

Then there were various caricatures, which in his days of popularity had afforded his many admirers much amusement.

An extensive library for a frontier dweller, numerous pieces of *bric-a-brac*, with many little souvenirs made by feminine hands, completed the furnishings of his parlor.

Another room adjoining was where he slept, and here also was every comfort, showing his luxurious mode of living, while a third room was where he ate his meals, and over the door of which had been artistically painted:

"He who entereth here
Leaveth appetite behind."

A substantial mess-table, sideboard and chairs formed the furniture, but the table linen was of the finest and the service solid silver, and it had always been a pleasure to those who could get an invitation to dine with Forrester, for his cook was the best at the fort, and his semi-valet and butler was thoroughly trained.

The fourth room was used as a gymnasium, and in it were horizontal bars, a swing, Indian clubs, foils, swords, rifles, shotguns and revolvers.

Several fine dogs had been the close companions of the young officer, and his stables had had a half-dozen splendid horses.

In dress he had been something of an exquisite, and a solitaire diamond he wore on his left little finger had caught the eye of many a fair girl, who thought what a charming engagement pledge it would make.

A handsome watch and chain, a souvenir presented to him for saving several lives in a city fire, and a number of other pieces of jewelry he possessed were the admiration of his brother officers.

And all this luxury it was said had been won by gambling, and, if such was not the case, he never took the trouble to contradict the report.

Such was the home of the "outcast officer," as he had become known of late, up to the time of the mystery overhanging his career since his going to the rescue of Captain Kennerley and his train.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN UNFORGOTTEN AIR.

FRED FORRESTER walked to his quarters like one in a dream.

He did not show joy at his promotion, which would have given him the utmost delight a few months before, and perhaps he never thought of it.

He entered his quarters, laid aside his sword and hat mechanically, and began to pace to and fro, without putting on his fatigue uniform as was his wont.

Since his recovery no one, except his servant, had really entered his quarters, for, when Surgeon Powell called, they had been wont to sit upon the piazza, so that the doctor had not discovered the change which had occurred in the rooms.

The silver service had gone from the dining-room, and the paintings and sketches from the walls of the little parlor.

The piano too was missing, and a general appearance of clearing out was upon all sides.

What could it mean?

The elegant quarters of the dashing, one-time *debonair* lieutenant were now as plainly furnished as were those of the poorest junior officer at the fort.

Something had come over the spirit of the dream of Fred Forrester, surely.

As he paced the room now his brow was clouded, his lips set, and ever and anon he would mutter something to himself.

Presently there came the bang of his little gate, and he started, looked out of the door, and beheld Surgeon Powell.

Upon other visits he had met the surgeon upon the piazza and they had sat there together, but now he called out:

"Come in, Powell."

"Why, Forrester, you look as though you had seen a ghost, for you are white-faced and nervous."

"I have seen what to me was worse than a

ghost; but sit down," and the words seemed forced.

"My dear Forrester, you are not well, and you have exerted yourself too much, after your severe wound."

"I must look after you yet, I see," and the surgeon spoke in the low, tender-voiced manner natural to him.

The officer laughed bitterly and said:

"I am perfectly well physically, Powell, there is no need of your services in that direction; but I suffer here, and here," and he put his hand first upon his heart, then upon his head.

"Perhaps I can help you, Forrester, so if you care to place confidence in me tell me of your troubles."

"If you need any money I have a few hundred laid up, which are at your service, I assure you."

"You dear good friend; but I have two months' pay due me, and a few hundred in hand—see, do you observe a change in my rooms?"

"I do, for they look sadly changed."

Another bitter laugh came from the lips of Forrester, and then he said:

"Powell, you are my friend and I trust you, so will tell you that when Sergeant Duke of my company went East on a sixty-days' leave, I sent by him my piano, silver, paintings and other things I could well do without."

"I have befriended Duke, and his home was near my own when we were boys, so I trust him thoroughly, and he has orders to sell all my things for the very highest sum he can get for them."

"I hope he can realize enough, with what I have, to nearly pay back the money I lost belonging to Miss Kennerley."

"When that is paid, I shall draw only my absolute needs from the paymaster, devoting the balance toward paying the Government back what I lost."

"If I stay in the army long enough, I shall pay it back, while if I get killed, I have an insurance on my life."

"Now you see what I am doing, only do not betray me."

"I have discharged one of my servants, and will sell all of my horses but two, along with my tandem cart and buggy, so you see I ought to get enough to pay Miss Kennerley every dollar."

"My dear Forrester, you are too sensitive about this, for only a few scandal-lovers believe you to have kept that money, and Miss Kennerley neither thinks of it, or needs it, I am sure."

"Still, I am guilty in the eyes of some."

"Had I not given up gambling, I might soon have won the amount, or perhaps lost far more. But I do not play cards now."

"Yes, that is remarked upon; but you must cheer up, Forrester, for you are a hero, remember, and a captain, and you'll live down these slurs of foes, my word upon it."

"But why do you not visit the general's, as he asks you to do, and Major Denton's, for certainly they are your friends?"

"I pay my duty-call at both places, Powell, and that is all I can or will do."

"I am no longer a society man, and I rather begin to find I am a pretty clever fellow, as I like my own company."

"You know this is no hint to you, for without your manly regard I would be desolate indeed, and I appreciate the kindly feeling of the men toward me, while I am sure I can count on Buffalo Bill. By the way, where is he?"

"Off on a scout."

"I have not seen him since I got over my wound."

"No, he came to see you before he left, and he is away on a special scout."

"He has been gone some time now, and I only hope no harm has befallen him."

"I hope not, but candidly am anxious about him, as the general is also. Hark!"

As silence fell between them the notes of a bugle broke upon their ears.

It was dark now, and they stepped out upon the piazza into the moonlight.

Then the notes of the bugle rose clear, ringing, pathetic, floating away into softest cadence, to the next burst forth in stirring melody.

Suddenly the air changed into the plaintive, weird notes of Campbell's "Soldier's Dream," and the bugle seemed fairly, under the touch of a master hand, to utter the words:

"The bugles sung truce, and the night-cloud had lowered,

And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky.

And thousands had sunk on the ground overpowered.

The weary to sleep and the wounded to die."

"My God, Powell! there is only one person I ever knew who could play like that on the bugle, could play that air, and—tell me! who is that bugler?"

The words at first in amazement uttered, changed almost fiercely as he asked the question.

"It is the Boy Bugler of your own regiment—Billy Blew," answered Powell, struck with the manner of Fred Forrester and remembering the scene upon the parade-ground.

"Billy Blew, the Boy Bugler—ah! that boy I saw, with his startling face."
 "Powell, will you do me a favor?"
 "Willingly."
 "I wish to know who it was that played that unforgotten air, for I knew one that played it just the same way."
 "Will you kindly send that Boy Bugler to me, now?"
 "Certainly; and I will drop in later to see you, and bring a nerve tonic I wish you to take."
 And the kind surgeon went on his errand, and soon after the Boy Bugler entered the quarters of Fred Forrester.

CHAPTER XXXV.
 IN THE NET.

I WILL now return to Buffalo Bill, whom I left in the camp of the Brimstone Brotherhood in the Spirit Canyon.

As he rode up with the four men who had been his captors, his horse, dress and appearance generally indicated that he was none other than Brick Benson, the Deserter Sergeant.

Then, too, there was his brand, of a red torch-holder with blue flame, and the number, *One*, on his mask, to indicate to the outlaw that he was the trusty messenger whom he had sent to the village of Snow Face, the renegade white chief.

The scout dismounted quietly, led his horse a few paces away and staked him out, and returned to the tent of the outlaw chief.

He had not taken the bit out of the horse's mouth, nor had he unsaddled him, while he had shortened the lariat.

The place where he staked him out was just where the canyon turned, and there was a clump of timber beyond through which the trail ran.

In his belt the scout had loosened his revolvers, and both of them were cocked, for a second of time might be a life to him.

His quick glance had shown him that the outlaws had their horses further away in the canyon, and the four who had returned with Buffalo Bill had already put their animals out to feed, unsaddling and unbridling them.

One had offered to take the scout's horse, but he had said he would look after him, when he had had a talk with the chief.

So quietly did Buffalo Bill make his arrangements for a sudden dash, if he found need of it, that not even the chief observed aught strange, and in fact no one now held suspicion of the scout's being a spy in the camp.

But Buffalo Bill had planned for all that might occur.

Captain Brimstone might recognize him, something might occur to arouse suspicion, and in that case there was but one thing to do, kill the chief and fly for his life.

He had been on the search of the trails in the neighborhood for a week, and learned the country well.

He had, by night, on foot, been almost into the canyon, so he was prepared for a flight, or a fight.

He walked up to the tent of Captain Brimstone, and took the hand extended to him.

"Benson, my friend, I am glad to see you back, for I was getting very anxious about you," he said in an earnest way.

"Why so, chief?"

"I thought that perhaps Snow Face had scalped you, or his braves had ambushed you?"

"They did, but got the worst of it."

"Ah! then your mission was a failure?"

"Oh, no, for I did not let the Sioux know I was forced to kill two of their braves."

"You see I resemble Buffalo Bill so very much, I looked for trouble, and to be on guard against ambush, I put a dummy in my saddle, and walked behind my horse."

"You are a smart one, Benson."

"Thank you, chief, I only have to out-Indian Indian you know, sir."

"And you did?"

"Two red-skins put holes into my dummy, see here are the wounds, for I dressed my blankets up in my coat, and as they sprung for the scalp, with a string I pulled the dummy out of the saddle, and simply shot them."

"Good! but you were lucky to think of your cunning scheme."

"Now tell me if you saw Snow Face?"

"I did, and gave him your letter, sir, and he has written one in return."

"I see; give it to me, please."

The chief took the letter and read it through, and then asked:

"Did you see him open my letter?"

"I did, sir."

"And read it?"

"Yes."

"Did he seem surprised?"

"He certainly started when he saw the writing and at what he read in the letter, chief."

"He then wrote this to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, he says he will be my ally, and asks when I intend to visit him, or retreat to his country, to send a courier on ahead that he may notify all of his hunting-parties."

"Yes, it would be wisest, sir, for the Sioux

are hard to make understand that some pale-faces are their friends and others their foes."

"They will understand my friendship better when I have sent them some plunder, which I will do."

"But you have done well, Benson, to go to the Sioux camps."

"Better remember to call me by my number."

"True, I'll bear it in mind; but let me know more of Snow Face."

"What more would you know, sir?"

"He is the real chief of the Sioux?"

"Yes, sir."

"And they obey him as such?"

"Oh, yes, they regard him as a superior being."

"How many braves has he?"

"Quite a large force."

"And his stronghold is a safe one?"

"Oh, yes, he could defend it against an army."

"Benson—I mean Number One?"

"Yes, chief."

"How does Snow Face live?"

"He has a cabin for his home, and his numerous raids have enabled him to furnish it most comfortably."

"Are there no white captives in his village?"

"I saw no captives, sir."

"Another question."

"Yes, sir, all you please."

"You were in his cabin?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he married?"

"I saw no Indian wife, sir, if he had any."

"I did not mean an Indian wife."

"With all the charges against Snow Face, chief, of wrong-doing, I have never heard of his taking white women captive to his village, though to men he is merciless."

Captain Brimstone gave a sigh of relief, and so did the scout, for he had cleverly fenced off the queries of the outlaw, whose words told him that he had a suspicion certainly that there was a white woman in the village of the Sioux.

"I had heard that Snow Face had a beautiful white captive with him, Number One, and I am glad to know such is not the case, as you say he has none."

"Rumors are often sent to the fort that there are white captives among the Indians, and I have always made it my duty to get at the truth—"

"Rumors sent to the fort—and you have made it your duty to discover the truth?"

The words were sharply uttered, and it was evident that the chief was suddenly made suspicious, and his words called the scout to a realization of what he had said; but he coolly returned:

"Yes, sir, for you remember I was a soldier, and am a deserter—"

"Ah, yes, but you startled me when you spoke of the fort."

"You know I must be so careful, in the life I lead, and I do not know who to trust, and am constantly in dread of finding a spy among my men."

"Do you think any man would take such risks, chief, as to come here?"

"Buffalo Bill would, in a minute."

The scout gave the credit to Captain Brimstone of hitting the truth dead center; but before more was said, Number Two came to the tent and called the chief aside.

That he was the subject of conversation, Buffalo Bill knew, and he saw that something had gone wrong; but he prepared for the worst, come as it might.

CHAPTER XXXVI.
 UNDER SUSPICION.

SOON after the arrival of Buffalo Bill in the rendezvous of the Brimstone Brotherhood, one of the members of the band rode into the canyon.

He headed for the chief's tent, but halted at Buffalo Bill's horse, and dismounting got down and examined his hoof-track carefully.

Then he moved on to the tent, and seeing that the chief was occupied, rode on to the other camps and dismounted.

Calling Number Two to him, he led him apart and said:

"Pard, who were ther last pilgrim thet come in?"

"A party of us come together."

"I means ther galoot whose hoss are yonder up ther canyon?"

"Ah, that are Number One."

"I see; but has yer seen his face?"

"I hev, and does yer know thar was four of us together, and we seen him coming, and so laid fer him, fer his face wasn't masked then, and we thought we had caught Buffalo Bill."

"And yer did?"

"No, though he are powerful like him."

"You bet he are, fer he are Buffalo Bill himself."

"No he ain't."

"I say he be."

"So did we say so, but he are ther man as is known in these parts as ther Sergeant Deserter."

"Nary."

"I say he be."

"I knows ther Sergeant Deserter, for we was tergether in Denver, and I knows Buffalo Bill too, you bet, fer he were ther cause o' havin' thet same pricked inter my hand thet yer sees thar," and the man held forth his right hand, on which were the words, pricked into the skin in red india-ink:

"THIEF AND MURDERER."

"Lordy, pard, thet are a hard brand ter bear."

"You bet it are, and some day I are going to brand ther face o' Buffalo Bill with just one word to git my revenge."

"And what are thet?" asked Number One, interested in the man whom he only knew by the number on his mask.

"DEATH!" was the savage reply.

"Well, he are a dangerous man for our crowd; but yer is off regardin' thet stranger."

"I hain't."

"I knows yer is."

"How does yer know it?"

"Why, we was a-scoutin', accordin' ter Cap'n Brimstone's orders, and we tuk yonder pilgrim fer Buffalo Bill, and we dropped our ropes onter him and tuk him in right slick."

"But he sprung his mask onter us, and it are Number One, and he told us as how ther cap'n hed sent him up to ther Sioux villages, so as we c'u'd be friends with Snow Face, ef we got down too hard."

"And he went?"

"He did."

"Who says so?"

"Why ther cap'n and ther renegade chief, as I understands it, are pards, and so he writ him a letter."

"Did he bring a letter back with him?"

"He did."

"How does yer know?"

"I seen him give ther cap'n a letter."

"Waal, it may be thet I are mistaken, but I guesses as I hain't, and I has a way o' findin' out."

"As how, Number Six?"

"Yer say he are ther Sergeant Deserter?"

"Yas."

"Brick Benson are his name."

"So it be, fer when he found we hed him, he owned up who he were, thet we should know, and he are about ther only man in camp I guesses, as any o' us knows who he be."

"Maybe."

"Ther chief is onter all o' us, of course; but durned ef I knows you, Pard Six."

"Nor does I know you, Pard Two; but I does know that Number One are Buffalo Bill."

"As how?"

"Waal, I think so, and ef I proves he hain't ther Deserter Sergeant, then he are bound ter be Buffalo Bill, hain't he?"

"Sart'in, fer ther Almighty hain't made three men so much alike, and *sich* men too."

"But what does yer intend ter do, pard?"

"I are going to ther chief and call him out."

"Then I shall hev a talk with him, telling him just what I hev did ther last week, since he sent me on a scout."

"He sent yer scoutin' too, pard, did he?"

"For sure, and I are been on one trail thet I think are goin' ter pan out great."

"Yer see we lives with a rope round our necks, and it are but right we should know our friends, from our foes, and, ef there are any spies in camp we wants ter know it afore we gits a rope about our necks ter choke us."

"You bet we does!"

"Now, I are a miser'bul sinner, and I hes did jist what this brand in my hand do say, kill and steal, and I don't want ter attend no hangin'-match whar I furnishes ther rope-fruit, don't yer see, and therefore I intends ter know jist how right I are."

"Yer bet, and I wants ter know, too."

"Wal, yer soon will, fer I are going ter tell ther chief what I knows, and ef he are ther Deserter Sergeant, then I are ther man as kin tell it, fer my pard hed a hand as I remembers."

"And ef he hain't ther Deserter Sergeant?"

"Then he be Buffalo Bill."

"Sart'in."

"And ef so, pard, then ther Brimstones open up ther biz big with a hangin' festival, at which it will be hands all 'round, pards, ter see ther fun."

So saying Number Six went toward the chief's tent to see if Number One was the Deserter Sergeant in reality, or Buffalo Bill in disguise.

CHAPTER XXXVII.
 BRANDED.

IT was Number Six who came to the tent and called Captain Brimstone aside, as he was talking with the scout.

Buffalo Bill intuitively felt that something had gone wrong.

He had seen the man come up the canyon, then halt at his horse, and next go over to the camps.

His conversation with Number Two was in full sight of where he sat, and so when the outlaw came to the chief's quarters and called him aside, the scout knew that there was a crisis at hand.

At first it flashed upon him to make a run for his horse and dash away.

He was sure of his aim, and knew that he could drop both the chief and Number Six where they stood conversing in a low tone.

Then all the other outlaws appeared to be in camp, and were a hundred yards away.

Their horses were unsaddled and unbridled, and staked out, while his was ready to mount, so that he could get all of a quarter of a mile start, and this meant a good deal to him.

To a man of Buffalo Bill's nerve the situation did not look at all desperate, and so he decided to remain.

Did he fly, then his work would not be done.

Did he remain, he might bluff his way through, and, if not, at the last moment it was time to act.

"I will wait," he said, calmly, and he seemed not to even know that he was suspected.

In the mean time Number Six had called the chief out of ear-shot and said:

"Cap'n, you know what I has done?"

"How should I, Number Six?"

"Waal, yer sent me out a-trailin', and I has been on a trail a couple o' days or so."

"What did you discover?"

"The trail o' a horse."

"And a man on his back?"

"Sart'in."

"Who?"

"Buffalo Bill!"

"The deuce!"

"Yas; he are a devil on wheels, cap'n."

"You mean to say that Buffalo Bill is trailing out our hiding-place?"

"No, cap'n."

"What do you mean? Come, no beating about the bush, but tell me at once."

"I means Buffalo Bill are in camp—he's yonder."

The chief laughed and said:

"Buffalo Bill is the biggest scare-crow on the plains, and half of you men see him in every tree you pass."

"Cap'n, ef yer knows me, and it's more than likely yer does, havin' engaged me fer this dance o' death biz, yer should know I were not born in ther woods ter be skeert by bear-tracks."

"Now, I went, as yer told me, on a scout, and two days ago I come upon a trail thet were leadin' inter ther mountains beyond here."

"So I followed it, and I jist hung to it, campin' on ther trail fer two nights, and it jist led me here."

"Yer see, it surrounded this canyon, and ther horse as made it were hitched a hundred times, I guesses, while ther rider were going around on foot, gittin' the location of this canyon down in his memory box."

"Well, it was Buffalo Bill, you say?"

"Yas, cap'n."

"This does look suspicious."

"It do."

"But did you see him?"

"I sees him now, for that yonder are ther horse whose hoof-racks I followed, and ther rider are in your tent thar, and he are Buffalo Bill."

"Number Six, you are mistaken, for that is my messenger, whom I sent to the camp of Snow Face, the renegade white chief of the Sioux, and he brought me a letter back."

"Why didn't he come straight inter camp?"

"I do not know."

"Who does yer think he be, cap'n?"

"As he is already known to some of the men, I will tell you, though I did hope no two of you would be known to each other."

"I spoke ter Number Two about him, cap'n, and he said as I was wrong, for he were ther Deserter Sergeant, and know'd as Num'er One."

"So he is."

"I were ther pard o' ther sergeant, cap'n."

"Ah! you knew him, then?"

"Mighty well, for we mined tergether fer some months."

"And more, I knows Buffalo Bill, for he put thet on me, I may say," and he held forth his hand, on which was the brand, in india-ink, of "Murderer and Thief."

"That's a bad mark to bear, and I have noticed it before, so knew you would be a good man for my band."

"Buffalo Bill gave you that, you say?"

"He hunted me down, and ther Regulators put it thar."

"And you did not deserve it, of course?"

"In course I did, cap'n, 'cause I hain't a man to go back on my own character."

"Then you would know the Deserter Sergeant if you saw him?"

"Among a hundred, cap'n."

"But I have been with him for some time past and also know him well, so how could he so suddenly change into Buffalo Bill?"

"Maybe Bill kilt ther sergeant, or captered him, and got onto ther leetle game, so played ther full hand himself."

"Nervy as Cody is, I do not believe he would do that."

"Waal, I does."

"It is possible, though not probable; but you would know the sergeant really?"

"Yas, and he sh'u'd know me."

"There is some sign by which you would know him?"

"Yas, cap'n, for ther Deserter Sergeant had a brand upon his left arm above ther wrist."

"You remember the brand?"

"Yas, cap'n."

"What is it?"

"A shield in red india-ink and ther letters in blue, 'B. B., U. S. A.'"

"We will see if that man has such a brand; but remember, there must be no mistake in this."

"Thar hain't none, Pard Cap'n."

"You are sure?"

"Yas, sir, I knows ther man and I knows ther brand, and more, ef he don't know me then he hain't ther sergeant."

"But you said Buffalo Bill knew you?"

"He does, when I hain't got my face kivered as I hev now."

"But ef it's ther sergeant, I'll jist ask him a question and see if he can answer his catechiz."

"That settles it, so come along with me—No, go to Number Two and tell him to take four men and come to the rear of my tent."

"When you have seen them start, and remember, the man in my tent must not suspect their being there, you drop in and I'll tell him what your suspicions are."

"If it is Buffalo Bill, then you must expect to have a desperate fight on your hands, so go prepared."

"You bet I does, for Buffalo Bill are a hegrizzly ter distarb, cap'n."

"Well, go now and do as I said, while I return to the tent, for I have some tests, too, that I can put to him and know the truth."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PUT TO THE TEST.

WHEN Captain Brimstone returned to the tent he spoke pleasantly to the scout and said:

"A little matter came up that Number Six was worried about, for he had been following your trail for a couple of days, he said."

As he spoke the chief eyed the scout intently through the eye-holes in his mask, and he could detect no movement, no start at his words, as from fear.

But it seemed to him as he regarded Buffalo Bill that he was a trifle heavier than the Deserter Sergeant, and his dark, waving hair did seem a little longer than had been the deserter's.

Still he was not sure, and so waited for the response of the scout.

With a laugh Buffalo Bill replied:

"If he has followed my trail of late then I pity the poor fellow, as he must have had a hard time of it."

"Did you not come direct from the village of Snow Face?"

"Not I, chief, for I am not one to be caught in a trap."

"Remember, if I am caught I would be hanged, and as I had been some weeks without seeing you, and was not certain what had taken place, I scouted entirely around this canyon in the mountains, now on horseback, now on foot, to be certain just who was in camp before I ventured in."

"It was after being certain I was right, I met Number Two and his party."

The chief gave a sigh of relief.

He did not wish to let him think that he doubted him, so would only hint and maneuver to get at the truth.

The explanation of Number One showed that Number Six was right in having so long followed his trail.

Just then he saw Number Six coming toward the tent, and he said:

"Benson, I may as well tell you the truth, and that is, the boys doubt you."

"Doubt me?"

"Yes, they do, though I do not."

"Now Number Six vows you are Buffalo Bill, that you have done away with the sergeant in some way, and are playing his rôle to betray us."

The scout did not move, and yet he was upon the point of whipping out a revolver and bringing matters to a crisis right there.

Still he checked himself, and remained motionless for full a minute.

Then, as Number Six entered the tent he broke out into a laugh.

He had seen the act of Number Two and others, in going back of the tent and he knew that he was in for it.

But not a muscle quivered, not a nerve gave way.

He was as firm as steel.

"This is the one who says I am Buffalo Bill, is it, chief?" he asked, turning his masked face full upon that of Number Two, who was slightly nonplused at the coolness of the man he accused, and with much reason, as the reader knows.

"Pard, I does say so, and yet they tells me you is ther Deserter Sergeant."

"Certainly; Brick Benson, at your service, sir."

"Yas; I knows his name were Brick Benson, or leastwise, that are what he hailed by."

"And you think I am not Brick Benson?"

"I do."

"Who do you take me for?"

"Buffalo Bill."

"I do resemble him, I admit, to a remarkable degree, and I have heard he has come near being hanged for me several times."

"Waal, I guesses this time it will be a case o' hangin', Buffalo Bill, fer I know'd ther Deserter Sergeant well."

"When and where?"

"We was miners together onst."

The scout's eyes had been reading the man ever since he had seen him enter the canyon and talk to Number Six.

He had been trying to place him.

Now the ordeal was upon him, but he did not falter, and said, eagerly:

"Then, if we were miners together, you are my old pard, Hank Harris."

"Put it there, pard!"

And the scout held forth his hand.

"Right you are, pard, I are Hank Harris; but these are ticklish times, and I have been in too much trouble not ter go keeful, and thar is one more test I wishes ter make afore me an' ther cap'n throws up ther game."

"It is not the captain that doubts me, for we have been friends ever since I chipped in one night in a saloon in the camps and helped him out when the game was six to one against him."

"That settles it, Number Six, for you are all wrong."

"This is the Deserter Sergeant, or he would never know that circumstance, nor would he know your name."

"Don't be a fool, Hank Harris."

"Cap'n, I hain't sich a fool as I looks, and for ther satisfaction o' myself and you and t'others I wants one more proof o' this gent's bein' Brick Benson, the Deserter Sergeant."

"And what test is that, Six?"

"Ther one I spoke of to yer."

"I forget."

"Ther leetle tattoo brand on ther arm."

"Ah, yes; you said that ther Deserter Sergeant had on his arm a tattoo above the wrist."

"Thet's what I said, Pard Cap'n."

"It was a shield in red india-ink, with letters in blue."

"Yas, ther letters were 'B. B., U. S. A.' fer I remembers 'em well."

The chief turned to the scout, and again came that light laugh, as though he defied the situation.

"Have you such a brand upon you, Number One?"

"I have."

"You make no effort to show it."

"Ah! do you wish to see it?"

"I do."

"I does, fer a fact."

"Pard, you are pushing matters a little hard against me under all circumstances."

"I'll throw up ther game an' ax pardon, ef yer kin show ther brand."

The scout held forth his arm, unbuttoned the cuff of his hunting-shirt and drew up his sleeve.

"Here is the brand, Hank Harris, and if you press me more after this you are going to get into trouble."

"I pass, pard, and axes yer humble pardon!" cried the outlaw, as his eyes fell upon the tattooed shield on the arm of the scout.

"Yes, there is the red shield and the blue letters, 'B. B., U. S. A.', so I also ask your pardon, Benson, for I confess to having doubted you from all Number Six had to say."

"Well, I need not get angry, for it is but right you should be careful," was the quiet response of the scout, who had so boldly come out of his desperate danger through his own nerve and forethought.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE OFFICER'S STORY.

WALKING his room, his face stamped with a look of intense mental suffering, Fred Forrester awaited the coming of the Boy Bugler, whose presence after parade had so startled him, and whose playing of the "Soldier's Dream" had recalled memories to him that were certainly most painful.

Suddenly a form stood in the doorway, and the officer turned quickly to behold Billie Blew.

He had not heard the little gate open and close, nor had there been the sound of a step upon the piazza; but the Boy Bugler was before him.

He stood upright, and saluted with respect, while he said politely:

"You ordered me to your presence, Captain Forrester?"

"Boy, who are you?" and Fred Forrester stepped close up to the youth and fixed his piercing eyes full upon his face, with an expression as though he would read his very soul.

"Billie Blew, sir, the Boy Bugler of your own regiment," was the prompt reply.

"That is not your name, sir."

"It is the name I bear, sir."

"You are deceiving me, Billie Blew—your name is Benson Roberts—no, no, it cannot be, either, for he was older than she was and a man then, no, no," and the officer spoke to himself rather than to the youth, who made no reply, simply standing in respectful silence.

Suddenly Captain Forrester grasped the Bugler's arm and drew him closer to the light, and again gazed into his face.

"Do I remind you of someone, captain, whom you recall unpleasantly?" asked the youth in a most innocent tone.

"Yes, you do remind me of some one whom I recall with dread and sorrow," was the reply, and the tone was uttered in sadness.

"A lady, maybe, sir?"

It was a bold suggestion to come from a soldier to his officer, but Fred Forrester did not seem to be angry.

He simply turned, walked to an easy-chair, lighted a cigar and sat down.

His manner had changed to seeming indifference, and its effect upon the Bugler seemed to make him nervous.

In an altered tone Captain Forrester said:

"Master Billie Blew, as you seem interested in me, I will tell you a little story.

"Sit there, sir!"

The last was an order, and the youth dropped into the seat to which his captain had pointed, and he seemed to be growing a trifle more uneasy.

"You asked just now if it was a lady whom your face recalled?"

"Yes, sir."

"I answer no, that it was one formed as an angel, but with the heart of a devil.

"She was a fiend, Master Billie Blew."

"That was too bad, sir."

"Yes, it was, and I am glad to see that you appreciate her wicked character."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Master Blew, I met this fair woman—fair in face and form, but hideous in heart—when she was seventeen years of age.

"It was when I was a cadet at West Point.

"The corps wished to get up a very elegant present for an army officer whom we admired, a subscription was raised and I was chosen to go to New York and make the purchase.

"I was given the money, one thousand dollars, and some dozen of the officers gave me their pay to deposit for them, so that I had quite a large sum with me.

"I took the boat at midnight and went to my state-room.

"I was about to turn in, when a tap came at my window, and opening it I saw a young girl in her night-dress and with a shawl thrown around her shoulders.

"Before I could utter a word in my surprise, she said hastily:

"You got on at West Point, and have a large sum of money with you.

"Two men followed you, and plotted outside of my window to spray your state-room with chloroform, enter this way, kill you, for one seems to hate you, and rob you.

"Be prepared for them."

"Well, Master Blew, she disappeared quickly and I waited for my enemies.

"My state-room was dark, so I left it and went to an officer and got him to aid me.

"We took our position in the state-room next to mine, which was unoccupied, and waited.

"Soon the two men came, and they began to spray my state-room with chloroform, for my window was ajar.

"After some time they pushed back the window, and stepping upon a chair one entered, and the other quickly followed.

"Then the officer and myself acted, for he had a lantern, and thrusting it into the window, we covered them with revolvers.

"I had placed a dummy in my berth, and locked my door, so they were caught.

"One, a soldier whom I had reported for punishment, had deserted that night, intending to kill and rob me.

"He had driven a long-bladed knife deep into the dummy, and so I owed my life to the young girl who had heard the plot outside of her state-room and warned me.

"She had gotten on the steamer above West Point, and so overheard all the two men had said.

"The next morning, in the city, I stood at the gangway and watched for my fair preserver.

"I knew her at a glance, and at once thanked her most warmly.

"She returned the next day on the steamer which carried me back, and as she lived in Newburg, I saw her quite often.

"Her home was there, and she lived with her mother, who had a little cottage and a small income, while her brother was West somewhere.

"Well, Master Blew, the girl fascinated me, her mother, who with many others believed I was to inherit a large fortune, encouraged our friendship, and one day I married the girl, upon condition that the marriage was to be a secret one until I graduated and got my lieutenantcy.

"I had never professed to be rich, and one day told my wife so.

"From that moment her mother and herself hated me, and they did all they could to get me expelled from West Point, but in this were unsuccessful, and I graduated Number One in my class.

"They kept the marriage secret, and I was ordered West, and soon after heard that she

had run off with a gambler, and I was glad of the riddance.

"Now, Master Blew, it is of that woman, my wife, whose name was Ruby Roberts, that you remind me, and certainly there was an evil streak in the family blood, for her brother, Benson Roberts, killed a man in the army, deserted and now has a price set on his head.

"Have you come out here to join your brother, Ruby, or to torment me, your husband?" and the words rung out in a threatening tone that brought the bugler to his feet, his face pale, his manner that of one suddenly startled beyond all self-control.

But in an instant the bugler was calm, and in a voice that was full of intense hatred, said:

"I came out here, Frederic Forrester, to make you suffer!"

CHAPTER XL.

A DIRECT CHARGE.

THE smile upon the face of Captain Fred Forrester, as he leisurely smoked his cigar, proved that he believed himself master of the situation.

The moment that it flashed upon him that Billie Blew, the Boy Bugler, was none other than his wife in disguise, he had become calm, and assumed an air of indifference.

She had believed herself unknown to him, and when she saw that he did know her she became startled.

But only for an instant, and then she regained her composure and boldly asserted that she had come West to cause him to suffer.

"I do not know how you can cause me to suffer, Ruby, except in the remembrance that I was such a fool as to marry you.

"I owed you my life, it is true, and since then I have had reason to regret that it was saved that night by you.

"You were beautiful, and appearing to love me, you fascinated me, so in an evil moment I made you my wife.

"You showed the cloven foot the very moment that I told you that I was not rich, and then I discovered that you had no soul, that you were a gold-worshiper, and that your mother and yourself were plotters.

"I came West, but I shared my money with you each month until I learned that you had run off with a gambler."

"No one can prove that I did so, and I am in the sight of the law, your wife."

"Granted."

"Well, I came out here to demand of you money, no small sum, mind you, but a large amount, and I will leave you forever the day I get it, and you can secretly get a divorce from me.

"But I hate you, Fred Forrester, for I tied myself to you believing you to be a millionaire.

"I love no man, but I worship gold.

"It is my god, and gold I will have.

"My mother died half a year ago."

"Thank God for that!" fervently said the officer.

But, unheeding his thankfulness at her mother's death, she went on:

"My mother had ceased to send us money, so I decided to seek you."

"Why not get it from the gambler?"

"It is to be proven that there is any one else in the question."

"All right; go on, for your story interests me."

She seemed not to like his indifferent manner, but continued:

"You are my husband, and I came to you, while I also knew my brother was out West here, and I wished to see him."

"Yes; he is a deserter and an outlaw, as I told you.

"I knew him from his resemblance to you, and he was enlisted as Robert Benson, so merely changed the name from Benson Roberts, you see.

"Now, with the charge of murder, desertion, and robbery against him, he is known as the Deserter Sergeant, a fitting brother, Ruby, for such a sister."

"What do you mean?" she said, almost fiercely.

"That I know you."

"You can make no harm out of my life other than my love of gold."

"Why are you here, disguised as a man?"

"I'll tell you—to get gold from you."

"I wished to see you as you would act not knowing me to be near, and so I decided to come in disguise."

"I sold the little home, and then fitted myself out in male attire, cut my hair off, and I make a very respectable-looking youth, quite a handsome one in fact, don't you think?"

"Oh, yes; I cannot deny your beauty of face or form."

"My form I have had to hide as much as possible, for it is too elegant for a boy's, you know, Fred."

"But no one has penetrated my disguise except you, and I showed no fear even when I was with Captain Kennerley's train, when you came to our rescue."

"Ah! now I understand Kennerley's doubt of me."

"You had some talks with him?"

"Oh, yes; I told him you had married my sister recently, and deserted her, and he said unless you made amends by claiming her he would prefer charges against you."

And the woman laughed as though she really relished the story she had told.

"Did you tell him aught else against me, or, that is, lie to him any more?"

"I simply hinted that you had squandered all my sister's money, which she intrusted to you."

"Now I understand Captain Kennerley's doubt of me, and I do not wonder at it."

"Ruby?"

"Yes, dear Fred."

"You are a beautiful devil."

"Thank you, Fred."

"Well, go on with your story."

"I have little more to tell, more than that I kept out of your sight, for I feared you would recognize me, and I did not wish that until I was ready to act."

"Major Denton made me regimental bugler, thanks to your skill in teaching me to play the cornet with you, seven years ago, when you were a cadet at The Point."

"To-day you knew me, or I saw that you would soon do so, and so I felt prepared for war, when an orderly came and told me you wished me to come to your quarters."

"Well, what is your intention?"

"You love Kate Kennerley, I see."

"How dare you say this to me?"

"Hold on, for you know I am your wife, if I do wear a uniform, so beware how you threaten me."

"Well, have your say," and Fred Forrester assumed his indifferent manner once more.

"You love Miss Kennerley, and you wish I was dead."

"You got her money, and lost it; but you are preparing to pay that back, I guess, to square yourself with her, while the court-martial whitewashed you as far as the paymaster's money was concerned."

"You know that, with several exceptions, every officer, his wife and family, believe you got that money, and you meet their suspicion with scorn."

"Well, what do you think, Ruby?"

"I know that you got the money, Miss Kennerley's and the Government's too," was the coolly-uttered response, and the words caused the face of Fred Forrester to turn livid, while he seemed unable to utter a word in denial of the direct charge the woman made against him.

CHAPTER XLI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

"HA! ha! ha!" laughed the disguised wife of Fred Forrester, as she saw that her direct charge of theft against the officer had hit him hard.

"You wonder how I knew that you got the money, Fred Forrester; but I do know it, and there are men ready to swear to the fact, and only keep quiet abiding my will, and yours, of course, for they can be bought, as I can, for I am for sale, but not cheap."

"Ruby, you are as wicked a woman as ever man had to deal with," at last the officer said, hoarsely.

"Granted, and we are well matched."

"No, no, do not say that."

"I do say it; but we are wasting time, and folks will wonder why the Boy Bugler is so long at the quarters of his captain, for what can a bugler and an officer have in common?"

"You can go, then, for you are nothing to me."

"But you are to me."

"Unfortunately I am your husband."

"Have you ever acknowledged the fact to any one?"

"Oh, no, I was too ashamed of my youthful act of indiscretion, and was not anxious to proclaim myself a fool."

"Well, let me tell you that now you are a captain your pay will be quite liberal, and, as I learn that you have dismissed your extra servants, and mess alone, you can live cheaply, so can pay back to Miss Kennerley her money from your savings, as a proof that you are innocent."

"And then you can win her, maybe, for you are a very handsome, dashing and fascinating fellow, Fred, and if gold was not my idol I might love you; but I'll never forgive you, a poor man, for having married me."

"You can get a divorce from me by paying for it; my price, I mean, and you can marry a fortune, for I learn that Miss Kennerley has just half a million in her own right, don't you see?"

"Now, husband mine, make a proposition."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I am for sale, so offer a price."

"I do not understand you, upon my honor."

"How obtuse! but in plain words, what will you pay for a divorce?"

"Not a cent can I, though, had I hundreds of thousands, I would give it all to be rid of you."

"Then I must expose you as a married man, and I'll make your having to marry me look as black as possible."

"I will play the injured maiden, you know—"

poor, fatherless, motherless, but beautiful and confiding."

"I do not doubt but that you are capable of any crime, Ruby."

"I never loved you, but felt grateful to you for having saved my life, and you fascinated me by seeming to love me so."

"I'll tell you that I did expect to have a large fortune left me, from an old uncle who was the soul of honor."

"He could understand no one's committing a sin, and he was a severely good old bachelor."

"You wrote to him and told him of our secret marriage, hoping that he would take you to his heart and home, and your mother also, and she would scheme to marry him and share his fortune."

"You did not know the man, for your touching letter and photograph enraged him, and he cut me off without a dollar, made a new will and left his large fortune to charity."

"So you see that it was your secret act, writing him without my consent, that made me lose my fortune."

"He said nothing to me, but left a letter with yours inclosed, and a copy of the one he wrote you in answer to yours to him."

"It told you that he would not speak to me again, but would cast me utterly out of his heart and fortune."

"So you see it was then, upon receiving his letter, that you and your mother changed toward me, and when you knew, after his death, that he had been as good as his word, you hated me."

"Now, Ruby, you see that I know you."

"And people here shall know you, as they will believe my story."

"I did not play my cards right with your old uncle, I admit, but it taught me a lesson, and this time I will make no mistakes."

"Why, I simply sent you the notice of my having fled with a gambler, to make you feel at ease, and that you were well rid of me."

"I put the notice in the little country paper myself, and then cut it out and forwarded it to you."

"I knew you would do some act to give me a hold upon you so I could force money from you, and you have done so."

"Oh, Ruby! could one look into your innocent, beautiful face and believe you could be so vile?"

"No, indeed; that's my strong card—my innocent beauty."

"But you see, dear Fred, you have no cause for a divorce; so I hold the trump cards in our little game, and shall play them to win."

"In heaven's name, what do you want?"

"Just twenty thousand dollars, Fred."

"Twenty thousand flenda! you are a fool."

"No, I am no fool; I am wise beyond my years, for I am only twenty-four, Fred, and look six years younger, now don't I, for there is not a line of care upon my face."

"Would that men could see your heart—see you as you are."

"But they cannot, for I do not wear it upon my sleeve as I do my bugler's insignia of rank, you know."

"But I want my money, Fred."

"I have no money to give you."

"A few hundreds, yes, if you will go away from here, but that is all."

"No hundreds for me, for thousands are my figure."

"I have named my price, Fred."

"You will never get it."

"Oh, yes."

"I say no, for what I have and expect I will pay to Miss Kennerley, as you suspected was my intention."

"Bah! that is all nonsense and sham."

"You do this to win her favor, when you could simply hand over the five thousand which you took of hers."

"Ruby, don't make me forget that I am a man, you a woman."

"No; bear both in mind, only pay me my money, and I'll go."

"Look here; I have some money saved up, and I am expecting more soon from sales made for me of my traps."

"All will be about five thousand dollars, which I intended to pay to Miss Kennerley; but I will give her an allowance from my pay each month to get rid of you; so if you will vow to leave me, to never come near me again, or to cross my path in any way, I will pay you that money."

"Again I tell you, Fred Forrester, that this sale business is all a fraud to cover up your crime."

"I will not take five thousand, nor ten thousand, nor fifteen."

"I know what you have, and it is just twenty-five thousand dollars in good crisp bills, hidden away."

"You paid your debts, you said, with what Gambler Gaul gave you, and yet your sales will bring you in five thousand more, if you told the truth and did get that money from him."

"Still you have the Government cash, and Miss Kennerley's, if it was not her amount you paid your debts with and lied about meeting Gambler Gaul."

"You see I know you thoroughly, and I intend to have that Government money."

"Give it to me, and I will go away and let you get a divorce secretly upon the plea of desertion, which you can do, and I'll do my share to aid you, for I wish to be free, as my face will win me a millionaire husband, you see."

"Now, Fred, pay me my price, and the Boy Bugler goes from this fort within the week."

"Do you hear?"

"Yes, and I wish you to hear me."

"Well?"

"If you do not leave this fort when the first train goes eastward, I will have you arrested and held for murder!"

A startled cry broke from the lips of the woman, and she slipped from her chair to the floor in a deep faint.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE OUTLAWS ORGANIZE.

WHEN Captain Brimstone had all of his men in camp, whom he had picked for his red work of outlawry, he decided to organize his band.

Whether he was in reality Gambler Gaul, the "Gentleman Sport," as he was often called, he certainly had shown marvelous skill in the selection of his men.

He had, as has been said, picked out his men to suit himself.

When convinced that he met a man who suited his wicked purpose, he would send a messenger, or write a note to him to meet him at a certain point.

Captain Brimstone would be masked, thus holding the advantage, and he would tell the man he wished him for work that would pay, but in the getting of the gold there would be risk of life, and red work to be done.

Hardly a man he selected thus failed him, and it was pretty good proof of his knowledge of human nature, or perhaps of the demoralization of the mining-camps of that period.

Having become sure of his man, Captain Brimstone gave him written directions with a map, of how to reach the rendezvous, and each one was to go alone, it was supposed.

But the chief was as cunning as he was clever, and he took half a dozen of the men with him, among them the Deserter Sergeant, and lay in wait for the others, to note that they came alone.

Had any of his men come with a party of strangers, they would have been shot down at the pass to the canyon, from an ambush retreat which the killers could hold and beat back a company.

But all had put in an appearance excepting the man Brass, and he had been, if not present, "accounted for" by his pard in the kidnapping affair, Cheeky.

As the reader has seen, however, there was one in the camp who had passed the ordeal of all tests, and yet was not the Deserter Sergeant.

That personage could have been accounted for also, by his impersonator, had he so wished; but he was going to play his game to the end.

The brand seen upon the scout's wrist was a squelcher to Number Six, his accuser, and not a shadow of doubt longer existed in his mind of the fact that he had again met his old mining-pard, Brick Benson.

And just at that test most men would have been found failures; but Buffalo Bill was as cunning as an Indian, so long had he been among them, and he had noted the mark on the dead sergeant's arm, and every other circumstance that might lead to his being taken for the man whom he was to play so boldly.

When he had gone to the fort, he had, it will be remembered, sought his own quarters, after an interview with General Carr, and taking from a case several bottles, he had spread them out before him and then sent for a scout who had once been a sailor.

"Dick," he said, as the scout entered, "I want you to give me another lesson in your india-ink artistic work by putting something upon my arm."

"All right, cap'n, when shall I begin?"

"Now; but tell me, is there no ink you can use that will die out in a few months?"

"Yes; I have inks that will fade out within six months, cap'n."

"They are imitations of the Eastern inks, for we never have learned the art of making them."

"Well, I have here the good inks you gave me; but I wish you to use the ones that will fade in putting this on my arm."

And he handed Scout Dick a rude drawing, sketched from the arm of the Deserter Sergeant.

"You are up to some bold game, Cap'n Bill," said Dick.

"Maybe I am, and, if so, and it pans out rich, I'll not forget you, Dick."

"Don't, please, cap'n."

And Dick set to work on the chief of scouts's arm.

Buffalo Bill watched him with the deepest interest, and after it was finished wrapped up the two kinds of ink and the implements, after which he sought a few hours' rest and then departed upon his secret expedition.

Having so far been successful in the gathering of his men, Captain Brimstone began upon his organization.

He called all around his tent, and in a few words told them his plans of action.

What he said was to the effect that he had studied thoroughly the branches of the Overland, and there were six stage trails that they could strike.

Each of these could be struck at three different points, and by as many different parties.

He appointed a rendezvous for the three parties to meet after each robbery, and each stage must be "held up" upon the same day.

No woman was to be robbed or insulted, and the revolver was to be used only when absolutely necessary to save the life of one of the Brotherhood.

All booty obtained was to be put in a common treasury and be divided, two-thirds to the men, one-third to himself.

He told them that he had organized another band of "Brimstones," and they had made a number of strikes on the trails, as they no doubt had heard.

But they had stolen from him, from each other, and he had been forced to get rid of them in a very summary way, so had not one of the old band with him.

If those now with him wished to guess how he had gotten rid of the others, they might do so, but he did not deem it necessary to tell, though if any of his men played the same game on him they would soon make the discovery.

"Now, my men," he added, "there is a test in this band that all must submit to, and you shall know what it is."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE TEST OF MEMBERSHIP.

THE speech of Captain Brimstone made a deep impression upon the men.

His words had been significant of evil to those who had served under him before.

He knew them, each man was aware, and yet who was he?

Not one could guess, with the exception of that one present who was not an outlaw.

"Men," he said, when the band sat in silence and regarding him most attentively as he stood in the glare of the firelight, while they sat around in a circle, forming a weird and picturesque group.

"Men, I say that there is a test for you, to prove you are fit for membership in the Brimstone Brotherhood."

"I have worked long for a band of men to be my backers, who would obey implicitly my orders, know no fear, and hesitate at nothing that I command."

"I believe I have found such men, and I will enrich you."

"I have spies in the forts, outposts, settlements and mining-camps, to tell me whenever there will be a move of a rich train, emigrant or Government, or a good haul from travelers on the Overland coaches."

"I have sent one of our band, Number One there, to Snow Face, the renegade white chief, whom I know well, and he has become our ally, so that we have nothing to fear from his redskins, and if hard pressed, we can retreat to them for refuge."

"I shall divide the band into three squads, one of ten men, which I shall take command of, another of six men, under Number Two, and a third, under Number Six, of four men under Number Twenty."

"This leaves Number One as a courier, for no man knows the country better than he does, and his duties will be to keep up constant communication between the three bands."

"This makes our force of twenty-four, for one man was lost on his way here."

"If we meet with losses of life, then I will recruit as I deem best."

"If any man is wounded, he shall be brought to this canyon and well cared for."

"Thus you see my plans, and if you like them say so."

A chorus of voices came in response, of agreement with the plans of the chief, who then said:

"Now, men, my test of membership is to have no man in it who has not taken human life."

"What have you to say, Number One, and remember I do not speak of life in self-defense, but the killing of a man whose taking off would cause you to hang?"

Buffalo Bill had given a smile of delight under his mask when he discovered that he was to act as courier.

Had the chief been anxious to aid him in his purpose, of bringing the band to judgment, he could not have played into his hand more readily.

When the "test of membership" was made known, he slightly started.

He had taken life, yes, many times.

He had slain Indians, had killed men in the discharge of his duty as an officer of the law and the army, and he had shot down an adversary in self-defense.

The list, and it was a long one, flashed before him with an almost appalling force, and he winced under it.

But he was glad to feel that he had never

wantonly taken the life of a human being, no not even an Indian, except in battle or on the war-trail.

These thoughts caused him to almost forget that it was as the Sergeant Deserter he was to speak, and not as Buffalo Bill.

The next words of the chief quickly recalled him to the fact that, as Brick Benson, he had taken life, so he arose and said:

"As I seem to be the only one whose mask is not a disguise for me, being known to you all as the Deserter Sergeant, need I go over the deeds that have made me an outlaw, Captain Brimstone?"

"No, the career of the Deserter Sergeant we all know, so you are excused and admitted as Member Number One, of the Brimstone Brotherhood."

"Does not our chief have to stand the same test?" asked the scout, hoping that the outlaw leader would tell of some red act which would place him in his mind.

"No, I neither am numbered, nor do I need to stand the test, other than to say that I have several graves of my digging that need not to have been filled had I been merciless."

"Number Two, your story, sir."

Number Two told his story, and the scout listened most attentively, as he did to all the others, and had his mask not hidden his face, it would have revealed that the deeds related by some of the men identified them perfectly in his mind.

They were cruel stories to hear, but all true, doubtless, and when the red deeds of the last man, by his account, had admitted him as a member, making the Brimstone Brotherhood complete, Number One arose, and facing the chief, said, in a voice that every one in the circle distinctly heard:

"Chief, to the better bind this band together, and allow of no desertion, no treachery, I have a plan to propose."

CHAPTER XLIV.

BUFFALO BILL'S BRAND.

WHEN the scout spoke as he did, after all believed there was no more to be said or done among the Brimstone Brotherhood as far as their organization was concerned, every eye was turned upon him with surprise and interest.

"You have something to propose, Number One, which your words imply is to our advantage," said Captain Brimstone, rather as a question than an assertion.

"I have, captain."

"Well, I am open to hear any proposition for our good and general interest, and I know you so well I am fully aware that you are to be depended upon entirely."

"Thank you for the compliment, captain; but I wish to propose a plan by which every man will feel himself bound more thoroughly, and certainly cannot shrink responsibility."

"You have had from each man the test of membership, and each man has subscribed in your book his vow of allegiance, giving his own name, known to you alone."

"Now, I would propose, as I said, still another plan to bind us together."

"Name it, and if I think it good, it shall be adopted."

"You are all aware," continued the pretended Deserter Sergeant, "that a man may get into a place some time where he can get a snug little sum for betraying his comrades."

"Then, too, he might strike a mining-camp-meeting and get religion, and feel that he would remain a miserable sinner until he had betrayed every one of his pards."

"In case of such circumstances, a man wearing a mask and when playing traitor or repenting, would be unknown to the rest of us; but if he had a brand on him, why, each one of us would know the other by that if not by his face."

"By the Rockies! you are right, Number One!" cried the chief, while Number Two, who felt himself as captain of Band Number Two next to the leader, called out:

"What kind of a brand?"

Before the masked scout could reply, others spoke up with:

"Does yer mean ter brand us with red-hot iron, pard?"

"Isn't yer mistakin' us fer cattle?"

"How does yer mean ter brand us, Number One?"

"When your questions are all in, I will answer," was the scout's cool reply, not at all disturbed by the excitement.

"Do so now, Number One, for I wish to know your plan."

"Silence all!"

Thus urged by the chief, Buffalo Bill held up his hand and said:

"You all see here that I wear a brand, if so I may call it, and this brand saved my life, too, in this very camp."

"You know me, many of you, by sight, as the Deserter Sergeant, and if you have ever seen the scout, Buffalo Bill, you have been struck with my almost startling resemblance to him, and, but that I was recognized by an old mining-pard here, who knew of this brand

upon my arm, I would have been hanged for Buffalo Bill, certain and sure, for even the chief, who had sent me upon a special mission, was suspicious of me."

"I am able to do this work, in india-ink, and I have, as you may have noticed, ornamented my buckskins with designs in it, so have some of it with me, and my proposition to the chief is to let me mark each one of us with some word or device he may select. Then there will not be one of us who can deny that we belong to the Brimstone Brotherhood."

"Have you ink in two colors, Number One?"

"Yes, chief."

"What are they?"

"Red and blue."

"And we are white, so we will have the national colors of red, white and blue."

"Get your colors and needles together tomorrow, Number One, and I will be the first one for you to work on. The device shall be a torch-handle of red, with a blue flame, and the letters in blue, B. B., with the number of each man in red."

A silence had fallen upon the men, for, somehow, they did not like the plan—at least some of them.

This the chief seeing, he was quick to demand:

"Are there any who object?"

"You'll be branded first, chief?" asked Number Seven.

"Yes."

"Will Number One be branded also?" Number Twenty-two inquired.

"I will, of course," answered Number One.

Still there was a silence among the men. Perhaps it was their superstitious natures that caused their hesitation, for one of them said in a growling tone:

"I heard it war bad luck ter brand humans."

"Yas, they dies young, so I has been told."

"They gits hung up, so it's said."

Other reasons, or make-believe reasons, were going the rounds of the group, when the stern voice of the chief checked them with:

"Silence all!"

At once he was obeyed, and he said, in a voice that showed he meant all that he uttered:

"I'll see to it that there shall be no traitor in this Brotherhood, and this hesitation on the part of some of you looks suspicious."

"To-morrow, Number One, be ready to brand, with the device I have said, every man of the band, yourself last, for I believe it makes one's arm a trifle sore, and you must do your work well."

"I will be the first for you to work on, and then the others, from Number Two, follow in regular order, and if any man refuses, then shall I regard him as an intended traitor, and he shall die in his tracks with the refusal on his lips."

This summary way of putting things at once told the band that they had a chief who was not to be trifled with, and not one objection was raised, though some black looks peered through the eye-holes of their masks at Number One for having made the proposition.

The next morning, however, Buffalo Bill was ready for the work, and the men gathered around with interest, and those who would not have flinched at a knife-cut or bullet-wound asked timidly:

"Will it hurt, pard?"

The chief was the first one to offer his wrist, and the device was very neatly done.

Then followed the others, until in several days the entire number had been tattooed.

Last came the scout himself, and he did the work less neatly on himself; but he did it with ink that would wear off soon.

The others were indelibly branded by Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XLV.

A BLOW THAT TOLD.

FOR a moment, after the disguised woman, the wife of the young officer, sunk to the floor, her husband stood regarding her with a look that was unfathomable.

At last, with a sigh, as he saw that she lay as still as one from whom the breath of life had departed, he bent over and taking her in his strong arms bore her to a lounge.

Then he procured some water, a handkerchief and bottle of ammonia, and soon brought her back to consciousness.

She recovered with a start, and the words broke from her lips in terror:

"Will they hang me for killing him?"

Then she saw who was bending over her, and with an effort gained her self-control, for hers was a wonderful nerve, and she possessed a will of iron.

Breaking forth into a merry laugh, she said:

"Why, what caused me to faint?"

"It was not soldierly, was it, Captain Forrester?"

"No, it was womanly, and shocks often cause one of your sex to faint, Ruby."

"But what shock did I have?"

"My threatening to have you arrested."

"For what, pray?"

"The murder of my uncle."

"Bah! you talk as silly as a child, husband mine."

"Ruby, I meant just what I said, and let me tell you that I know all."

"All what?"

"I know that after you wrote to my uncle, and received his letter, telling you I had been his heir, but that he would change his will, you and your mother decided to act."

"Now, you were determined to have his gold, being my wife, and if I was the heir, it was easy enough to get rid of me afterward."

"So you set your heads together, and the result was a devilish plot, worthy of you."

"This is all news to me, Fred dear."

"Then you will be happy to hear the story."

"You knew that my uncle employed a young girl who wrote his letters for him, and was in fact, half servant, half secretary."

"Knowing his severe morals and nature, from his letter to you, you wrote him an anonymous letter, accusing the young girl of many acts, and he at once gave her her discharge, paid her for the year I am glad to know, and advertised for another."

"You answered that advertisement."

"I?"

"Yes."

"It is false."

"We shall see if it is."

"Your honeyed ways and magnetism won the old gentleman over, and he at once engaged you at a large salary, and he believed your story of being an orphan and all that."

"I had no idea why you did this, until my uncle's death."

"Then his lawyer, my intimate friend, wrote me how I had been cut off without a dollar, and begged me to come East at once."

"I did so, and he told me he was convinced that there had been foul play, and we began to unravel the damnable plot, I, in disguise, acting as detective."

"He told me he was sure you had a motive in coming there the moment he saw you, and you had asked him about the will, and he led you to believe it had not been changed, little fearing harm from it."

"Then you acted, for you poisoned him to prevent his changing the will, for he had had it changed the moment he got your letter about me."

"So you took his life, but too late to make me the heir."

"It is false!"

"No, for we have proof, in the poison you left in your room."

"The lawyer amused himself at times with amateur photographing, and while at my uncle's twice, took your photograph when you were unconscious of the fact."

"I could kill him for it!"

"Ah! your words betray that you were at my uncle's then; so do the photographs, and the poison you left in your room we took to a chemist, and he said a young girl bought it, bringing a doctor's prescription."

"Now I know your skill in writing a prescription, as your father, who was a doctor, taught you much of medicine, and we showed him a number of photographs and asked him to select the purchaser from among them."

"He selected yours, my dear Ruby, and the prescription was in your handwriting, which is so like a man's, you know, while it is signed: 'Reuben Roberts, M.D.'"

"Don't you see, my dear, how you have betrayed yourself?"

She made no reply, but her eyes were like flashes of fire as she glared upon him.

"But there is more to tell."

"Go on, please."

"My lawyer friend was first a doctor, and, suspecting foul play, he decided to have a post mortem examination of my uncle's body."

"This he did, and he discovered the cause of death to have been poison, the same that you had purchased."

"He kept the secret and told me only, and, in my capacity as a detective, I worked up a clear case against you, but we decided to let you escape, as I told him just what you were to me, and why you committed murder was plain."

"So the secret was buried in my uncle's grave, and I returned West, leaving you unpunished."

"But now you have dogged me here, and I tell you frankly, Ruby, you must go your way."

"More, you must take means to at once divorce yourself from me, upon any plea you deem fit, for I will not appear, and thus our paths in life will forever divide."

"No, I will not."

"Then I shall write to my lawyer friend to at once send a warrant here for your arrest, and begin steps to punish you for your crime."

"And thus have it known that you are my husband?"

"Oh, yes; men often make such mistakes, and those seeing you will not wonder that I loved you, not knowing the black heart your beautiful face masks so thoroughly."

"Do you think you are in a position to stand more scandal just now?"

"I would like to avoid it, but will face all if

you do not obey me and end this farce, at once getting a divorce."

"Fred Forrester?"

And there were twinkling devils in the woman's eyes as she spoke.

"Yes."

"Make your charge against me, and I will prove by competent witnesses it is done to shield yourself, to avenge yourself on me because I have proofs of your stealing the money of the Government and Kate Kennerley."

"I am no fool, Fred, and I am prepared to prove all I threaten."

"Now, go ahead."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A COMPROMISE.

It was certainly carrying out the old line of "diamond cut diamond," between these two, Fred Forrester, as gallant an officer as there was in the army, handsome, brilliant and most companionable to all; before the cloud fell upon him, and the girl adventurer, his wife, who had played upon his feelings by professed love for him, and won him, through her having saved his life, into a secret marriage with her.

He was an untutored boy, then, as it were, a cadet at West Point, and she, though a girl in years, bold, willful, scheming.

She had her idol, gold, and she meant to worship it at any and every cost, and sacrifice of honor and all else.

He had, when he brought the charge of murder against her, broken through the barrier of her proud defiance, and she had revealed her weakness.

It had come so sudden, this knowledge of his of the part she had played against his uncle, for his sake, and yet for her own in the end.

To no one had she believed it known, and she was fairly stunned by the clever manner in which he had tracked her.

Was she not so clever, after all, she wondered?

But she was not going to be beaten, and she faced him with the charge of his theft of the money intrusted to him, and startled him by telling him that she could produce witnesses to swear to his guilt.

Here he showed weakness, a weakness that looked like guilt.

If not guilty, why did he not defy her to prove his guilt, and produce her witnesses.

He seemed as deeply moved as she had been at the charge of murder he had hurled upon her.

Thus the two were placed toward each other, as the last chapter revealed.

Now he paced the floor, his face the picture of suffering, while she leaned back in a chair and seemed to enjoy the situation.

Suddenly she sprung to her feet and stood with respect before him, for a step had come upon the piazza, and Surgeon Powell entered.

The surgeon saw at a glance that something was wrong.

As for Fred Forrester he said eagerly:

"I am glad you have come, Powell, for I wish to ask your advice, for I am in a sad, an unfortunate quandary."

"Any service I can render, Captain Forrester, command me," was the answer.

"Well, I must tell you a secret and let you decide what is best for me to do."

"If your secret includes me, Captain Forrester, I respectfully request that you do not tell it, as you have no right to betray my confidence to extricate yourself from a difficulty."

Powell turned with amazement toward the supposed Boy Bugler, who had uttered the words, and then looked at Fred Forrester, as though to ask:

"What does this mean?"

"Do you refuse to let Surgeon Powell know the secret between us, and thus be able to advise?"

"I do, sir," and the Boy Bugler saluted politely.

"Suppose I do not heed your wishes, Master Billie Blew?"

"Captain Forrester will hardly do an act that an officer and a gentleman would scorn to do."

Surgeon Powell was more amazed, and he regarded the youth, as he supposed the woman to be, more attentively.

"Surgeon Powell, as this youth puts it, I feel I cannot act; but I wish to see you upon another matter, and meanwhile please await me here."

"Bugler, come with me!"

The bugler saluted, then repeated the salute to the surgeon and followed Fred Forrester from the room.

Frank Powell gave a low whistle and dropped into a chair.

Out to the little gate Fred Forrester led the way and then turned to his wife.

"Ruby?"

"Yes, dear Fred."

"What do you wish?"

"Twenty thousand in cash, and a few hundreds over for my expenses here and back."

"You will never get it."

"I will."

"I will give you five thousand and you can go your way."

"Not a dollar under the sum I named."

"I have not the money."

"You have what Captain Kennerley intrusted to you."

"I say again it is false."

"I say again I can prove it."

"Do your worst."

"Don't dare me, for it would ruin you even if I were hanged for killing your uncle."

"Well, come in and see me to-morrow night, for I wish to see Surgeon Powell."

"Will you dare tell him after my threat?"

"No, but I wish to ask a favor of him."

"Money?"

"No."

"What?"

"I wish to ask him to find for me Gambler Gaul."

"Why?"

"If I find him, I can get money to buy you off, I hope."

"Very well, let him find him, and I will be content."

"I rather like playing the part of a boy, and can stand it for a month, so I'll give you just that time to pay me my price in."

"If you refuse then, I will go to General Carr and play the innocent, injured young wife, and have my witnesses to prove that you did take that money."

"I can also prove an *alibi* that will upset your calculations to make me out a murderer."

"Will this month's respite serve you as a compromise between us, Fred, dear?"

"Yes—go!"

She saluted, and, turning upon her heel, walked away, while, with a muttered imprecation upon her head, Fred Forrester returned into the house to learn why Surgeon Powell had called again, yet glad that he had done so, as he was anxious to at once ask him to aid him in finding Gambler Gaul.

Thus there was an armed truce between the two, the husband and wife, or, as she had put it, a compromise, yet with every reason for both to dread what the future might have in store for them.

Still, with both at bay, there was nothing else to be done for the present, and both seemed to breathe more freely that the compromise had been made.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FRED FORRESTER'S RESOLVE.

WHEN Fred Forrester returned to his library, he saw no indication in the face of Surgeon Frank Powell that he had noticed aught in the demeanor of the bugler that was of a disagreeable nature.

But he took up a cigar-stand, handed one to the surgeon, and, lighting one himself, sat down with the manner of a man who had something on his mind and wished to communicate it.

The surgeon waited a moment, and then said:

"Forrester, I came back to see you to-night on account of a mutual friend, about whom there seems to be much growing anxiety, and whom I am most anxious to find."

"Ah! you are anxious to find some one, Powell?"

"So am I," abruptly broke in the young captain.

Then he continued hastily:

"Let me tell you, Powell, that you saw me affected by the sight of that—that Boy Bugler, this afternoon?"

"Well, his face brought up bitter memories in my past life, and I sent for him—yes, you were good enough to order him here."

"He is nearly connected with my past, but how I cannot now tell you, for he begged I should not."

"He gives me a month's grace, and in that time I am anxious to find one person."

"If I do, then all may go well; but if not, then I shall make a clean breast of it to you, ask your advice, and be guided by it, and, if necessary, go before the general and confess the whole truth."

"For many reasons I care not to do this, so desire to find my man first."

"You know best, Forrester, and I do not desire any confidence you do not care to freely give me; but I feel that you are in trouble, I know that you have some secret cause for suffering, and when the time comes for me to help you out, if in my power, command me."

"Just like you, my noble Powell, and I thank you."

"Now who is it that you wish to find?"

Fred Forrester hesitated a moment, and seemed embarrassed.

Then he said in a low tone:

"The man whom you know as Gambler Gaul."

"Ah!"

"Yes, that is the man."

"If I am not mistaken, Forrester, I told you, when you were ill, that the general and myself were also anxious to find that very man."

"Pardon me for touching upon the unpleasant past; but General Carr, Major Denton, and Miss Kennerley thought that if this man, Gambler Gaul, could be found, it would prove conclusively that you had gotten your money from him, with which your debts were paid, and thus

go far to clear up the other affair, or make all believe it to be as you had said."

"And you also thought so?"

"Yes, but I did not mention myself, as I knew you would take it for granted."

"Miss Kennerley also urged the finding of this man?"

"She did."

"Go on, please."

"Well, Buffalo Bill went in search of him but was unsuccessful, and, I believe got upon another trail that he is now upon."

"Yes, he has been absent for some time; but where did Cody search for Gambler Gaul?"

"In the mining-camps and along the frontier posts."

"And failed to find any clew of him?"

"Yes, he could learn nothing regarding him."

"Powell?"

"Yes, captain."

"I wanted to ask you about the best scouts to put upon this man's track, and see if I could not get permission from the general to send them on the trail."

"But perhaps it would be best for me to go myself, and so I will beg the general to give me a month's leave and let me take the trail."

"Alone?"

"Yes, why not, for you know I am a good frontiersman."

"I know it, better than half the scouts; but I do not like your going alone, and yet I cannot accompany you, as I have one of my assistants off on leave you know."

"I prefer to go alone."

"Now look here, Fred Forrester, I am your friend, as you know, and I speak out my mind as freely as a darky convert at the mourners' bench, so I tell you frankly if you go alone to seek Gambler Gaul, all will say that you went to have him fixed, fixed I say, and you know what it means, to come here and tell the story as you wish it."

"Go, yes, find him, yes; but take Texas Jack with you, yes, and a sergeant and a couple of men to be trusted, and when you see Gambler Gaul ask him in *their* presence, if he did not pay you the money, and before you have said one word to him in private."

"This will help you, Forrester, and my word on it you will yet make those enemies of yours hang their heads in your presence."

"Will you do this?"

"No, I must go alone," was the low response, uttered as though with the deepest regret that the words had to be spoken.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE COURIER "ON DUTY."

THE Brimstone Brotherhood having become a band to suit their own lawless bents, were promptly set to work by their unknown chief.

He led the whole band over the country they were to operate in, and then divided the men into the three squads which he had intended to have, when he organized them, not only for safety, but to gain the greatest amount of booty thereby.

Having placed the trio of camps, he returned to his own men, leaving the others to strike a blow the first opportunity that offered.

He was accompanied back to his command by Number One, the courier, and there was nothing to do then but to await future developments.

The separate trails on which the trio of bands were to work were far apart, so that the courier at times might have a ride of two hundred miles in making the three camps; but, instead of this being a cause of regret to Buffalo Bill, he seemed to be rather pleased with the arrangement.

The camp chosen by the chief for his temporary quarters was a secure retreat, as well as a pleasant abiding-place.

It was in a rocky glen, where there were flowing streams, plenty of grass, and where the men readily threw up comfortable quarters.

There was an exit, in case of surprise, as well as an entrance that could be well guarded.

The main Overland stage trail ran about five miles from them, and there booty was to be obtained, and the fort was eighty miles away.

Band Number Two was sixty miles distant, and its operations extended over a space of forty miles, across to two stage and other trails.

Some seventy miles from this was Band Number Three's station, and it also had a range of thirty miles, or so, and thus the courier might have a very extended ride of it, should each band not be at its home retreat.

These three stations formed a triangle, as it were, around Fort Fairview, three settlements and half a dozen mining-camps, cutting the trails leading to all, but leaving a retreat for the two smaller bands at the ends to retreat upon the chief's at the point nearest the country of the Sioux, over which was Snow Face, the renegade.

Not one of the three were nearer than seventy miles of the fort, but in making his run the courier could "cut corners," so to speak, if he dared do so, and go within forty miles of the fort where General Carr held command.

Such was the situation chosen by Captain Brimstone, and he had shown himself very clever in his choice, for he could strike a dozen trails, two settlements and half a dozen mining-camps, and if needed throw his force together in a day's time and retreat beyond all pursuit into the country of Snow Face, the renegade.

After a few days in camp Captain Brimstone called his courier to him and said:

"Number One, I expect important papers awaiting me at Ranch Number Ten, so go there and ask for Rocky Mountain Rob, and tell him you come from Brimstone, showing your mask, and he will turn over to you what news he has for me.

"Then make the circuit, you will find on this slip of paper, with the names of those who are my spies, get your information, and return by bands Number Two and Three and see if they have aught to report."

"Yes, chief."

"The round may take you four days, perhaps five."

"Perhaps as long, chief; but I am well mounted," and a few minutes after Buffalo Bill, acting as an outlaw's courier, was off upon his mission.

He rode to the stage station known as Ranch Number Ten, and there found the individual who answered to the name of Rocky Mountain Rob.

He had long suspected this very fellow as being a scamp, but had never before had proof of it.

"Hello, Buffalo Bill, how does yer do, and waat brings yer in this locality?" said Rocky Mountain Rob, who was holding the position of cowboy at the ranch.

"Pard Rob, you are off, for I think you have seen me often enough to recognize me, much as I do look like Buffalo Bill, though I have to play Cody when I come on secret missions to you from Brimstone."

"The deuce! you is ther Deserter Sergeant."

"I thought you'd get the specs off your eyes."

"Now I'll show you my brand, and the chief has sent for news."

"I has some fer him, and here it be, and my idee are, sergeant, you'll be kilt by some o' our folks for Buffalo Bill, or some o' ther sogers fer yerself."

"It are dangerous ter resemble two men as yer does."

"I look like myself and only resemble one, Rob," said the scout, and he took the papers handed to him, and soon after went upon his way.

Once alone he examined the papers and found that one was a report of a Government train coming through on the trail of Band Number One, on a date six days from that, and there might be a small guard of soldiers with it, and perhaps not.

There would be five ambulances and three wagons, containing officers' baggage and purchases, and altogether some valuable plunder.

The other paper spoke of an extra coach that was to carry out of Yellow Dust Mine the savings of some dozen miners.

It was to run the trail by night, camping by day, and not on the schedule time of the regular coaches.

"Two valuable hauls, indeed," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he put spurs to his horse and rode on to the next stand where a spy was on duty.

This individual had no news to report, but he was marked down in the scout's memory for "future reference."

A third also had no news, but was also booked, and then Buffalo Bill headed for a settlement in which lived an outlaw spy.

He learned from him that there was an emigrant train coming through within three weeks of well-to-do people who had money to live on until their crops came in after reaching their new homes.

Then the scout went to the station of Number Two, and learned that the outlaws had "held up" a coach and "struck it rich," in frontier parlance.

The courier next rode to the stage-station on the Overland, which Captain Brimstone had marked down as one where he had no spy.

He appeared here as Buffalo Bill, as he did on his other trails, playing the Deserter Sergeant only when the necessity occurred.

At this station he wrote a long letter, addressed it and said to the agent:

"Bruce, when do you expect the fort courier through?"

"To-morrow, Bill."

"Give him this and do not tell him I was here, but say he must hand this personally to General Carr."

"All right, Bill," and then Buffalo Bill left the station and headed his horse for the retreat of Band Number Three of the Brimstone Brotherhood.

Though the smallest of the trio of "outfits," they had panned out most wealth, and the courier took back what would be to Captain Brimstone good news.

As he arrived at night his presence was not known until he walked up to the chief's quarters to start back with amazement, for there he beheld none other than Fred Forrester.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SHADOWS DEEPEN.

THE assertion of the young officer, Fred Forrester, that he would go alone upon his hunt for Gambler Gaul, pained Surgeon Frank Powell deeply, and for a moment there flashed upon him the thought that after all of his trust he might be wrong and the captain be the guilty man others asserted that he was.

But he banished the thought as unworthy one who held true friendship, and so said:

"You know best, Forrester, only I think it better that you should take others with you."

"Powell, you deem it strange in me, and yet I cannot explain, so you must trust me."

"I will, Forrester, with all my confidence."

"Frank Powell is no man to go back upon a friend or foe."

"I know it, and I say therefore trust me; but I must go alone."

"So be it, and when?"

"I shall start to-morrow night, for I wish to go quietly, and then I expect news by mail to-morrow, when the coach comes in."

"The general will permit you to go, think you?"

"Yes, he must," was the decided response.

"Now then about our mutual friend of whom I spoke?"

"Who?"

"Cody."

"Ah, yes, no news has come from him?"

"No, and Texas Jack and his men are very nervous about him, for he started on a mission which they know nothing about, and he has been gone so long."

"Yes, and it would be well to send out in search of him."

"Just my idea, and I was going to ask you to make the search."

"I would, but my duty calls me on this other search now, though I shall have an eye out for Cody."

"Well, I was intending to ask you to go with me to the general and request a search party to be sent after Bill, of which you took command; but you will suggest some one else now?"

"Yes, Burke Blackford," was the sarcastic response.

"We wish to find Cody, you know, Forrester," reproachfully said Frank Powell, and his reproach was anything but complimentary to Lieutenant Blackford.

"Oh, Blackford would be in no danger if Texas Jack went along, and the ride might do him good."

"I merely suggested it, you know."

"Yes, and it would be a good joke if the general sent him; but will you go with me now to headquarters?"

"Certainly," and the two friends walked over to see General Carr.

Major Denton, his wife and Kate Kennerley, were visiting there, but the general went into his private office as the orderly reported the gentlemen wished to see him personally.

"Be seated, gentlemen, and say how I can serve you."

"Help yourselves to cigars, and let me drink your good health in a glass of wine," and the general courteously entertained his visitors until he saw that they had come for some special purpose, which Surgeon Powell broke the ice with:

"General, pardon me if I ask if you know where Buffalo Bill is?"

"Surgeon Powell, I regret to say that I do not—why?"

"Well, sir, you know that Cody is called out here my Border Brother, and his scouts sent a delegation to me to-night in great anxiety about him, and so I come to you, sir, to see what I can say to them, and ask if a search party, if you deem it necessary, may not go after him?"

"I said, Surgeon Powell, that I did not know where Cody is, and I do not in one sense, though he went upon a special service, as you are aware, with my consent."

"But it has been so long since I have heard from him, that I too am most anxious, and was thinking of asking Captain Forrester to take his company on a search for him, with Texas Jack as guide, for you, doctor, are tied to the fort just now."

"Yes, sir, I would be glad to go could I do so in justice to others."

"I must ask, general, to be excused, as I have come to request of you a favor in the shape of a leave, for I wish to go off on a trail alone, for a week, perhaps longer."

"Indeed, Forrester?" and General Carr was evidently surprised.

"Yes, general; and I can offer now, sir, no explanation other than to say that I hope to be able to do so at a future day."

"I grant you leave, Captain Forrester; but it is risky going alone."

"I am a good scout, sir, as you have often honored me by saying, and have no fear."

"When do you desire to start, sir?"

"To-morrow night, general."

"You can do so, and I make your leave ten days."

"With a grace of four more, sir?" asked For-

rester, with one of his old smiles now seldom seen.

"Yes."

"Thank you, sir; and would you permit me to take the liberty of suggesting an officer to go on the search for Cody?"

"Whom would you suggest in your place?"

"Lieutenant Blackford, sir."

The general smiled.

Blackford was a fire-eater, only no one remembered to have seen him engaged in the past.

He was a dead shot, a superb swordsman, a fine rider, and looked the model officer; but somehow he had evaded every duty of danger that had given him a chance for fame since he had been at the fort.

He had not done so perhaps intentionally, only he had gotten off in some way.

If there was a weary trip to make, Blackford failed to suffer from the fatigue of the march, for some duty kept him elsewhere.

His luck in avoiding guard duty was known to all, and though he had come to Fairview heralded from his former post as a superb officer, splendid fellow, and all that, he had since his coming shown more brilliantly in the drawing-room than at drills, and the ladies voted him a "splendid fellow," where his brother officers put him down as a "devilish lucky dog," who "knows how to look after the interests of one, Blackford, amazingly well."

His courage no one had doubted.

So the general smiled, but said:

"It would be a good idea, Forrester, and perhaps Miss Kennerley might give me a vote of thanks, and perhaps mentally anathematize me, for who can tell a woman's humor?"

"But Blackford must go."

"I pronounce him in perfect health beforehand, only needing hard exercise, general," laughed Powell, who added:

"He's like an eel, you know, sir, where hard work is concerned."

"Yes, he keeps a whole dictionary of excuses; but I will send him."

"As Texas Jack will go, general, naturally he will be the one to advise Mr. Blackford as to what is best, for he is to be depended upon."

"Certainly, Powell, and I would hardly care to send Blackford, until he has been tried, under a less experienced scout than is Omohundro."

"Have you any trail to suggest they should take, Powell, for you know Cody went toward the Sioux country?"

"No, sir, for any hints you may give Texas Jack will be enough for him to act upon."

"And you, Forrester, will not go with this party?"

"I do not go their way, general, as you say it is toward the Sioux country."

"And you will not take at least a scout with you, for these are dangerous times on the border?"

"True, sir, but I will go alone."

"As you please," and the general spoke coldly, but a moment after added pleasantly:

"Now come into the parlor and join us, gentlemen."

But both declined, and took their leave, and the general re-entered the parlors alone, wondering at the strange motive of Fred Forrester in leaving the fort for ten days, to go he did not say where, and seeming so determined to go alone.

"I wish all this mystery would clear up, but the clouds over Forrester's head seem to me to be deepening, though I will still hold faith in the brave, but unfortunate fellow."

CHAPTER L.

THE TWO COURIERS.

WHEN General Carr returned to the parlors he joined the group in which were Major Denton, his wife, Kate Kennerley, and Lieutenant Blackford.

"Major," he said aloud, as though he had no secret matter to communicate, "I have just had information that causes me to deem it necessary to send a search expedition after Buffalo Bill, about whom I am really anxious."

"As I am, general; and have you selected the officer?" replied the major, who seemed to read in the face of the commander a twinkle of mischief, in spite of his anxiety about Buffalo Bill.

"Have you any one to suggest, major, for you know this will be no child's play?"

The major did not see the meaning glance of the general as well as his wife did, but heard her quick, low whisper:

"Name Blackford."

"I think Lieutenant Blackford would be glad of a chance, general," said the major.

"The very man I had in mind—"

"Ah! I heard my name spoken."

"What can I do, general?" and Burke Blackford dropped his glass from his eye, an affectation he had, for his eyesight was perfect, and turned toward the general, who responded:

"I spoke of you as the commander of this search-party for Cody, Blackford."

"Why, yes; certainly, general, I feel honored; but then, you know, Powell has me in charge, but—"

"He told me he gave you a clean bill of health."

"Then, sir, if my horses are all right, I can be ready by to-morrow."

"You must start within the hour, Lieutenant Blackford, and if your horses are not in condition, use mine."

"Come to my office, please, for orders when ready."

Burke Blackford was cornered, and he saw no way to escape.

He would have to exert his lazy self at last, and so he bowed and departed.

But he went to the quarters of Frank Powell and said:

"My dear Powell, do you think I am in condition for a hard ride of days and nights, for I fear it may be an injury to me, and if you would only say to the general that—"

"I have told him you were in perfect condition, Blackford, and I think in this matter the general is not in humor to stand any trifling, so let me give you some advice that is not professional and say go at once."

"Oh, Lord! and I had an engagement with the Benson girls for croquet to-morrow morning, and a horseback ride in the afternoon with Miss Kennerley, with tea at the major's—I declare it is awful to put this upon me."

"Why is it done, I wonder?"

"If you ask me, it is doubtless on account of their never having been able to pin you down to a hard duty since you came to the fort; but don't let me detain you, Blackford, though I would add that this is a very perilous duty you are going on, and my advice to you is to yield to Texas Jack in all things, or a massacre of your force may be the result."

"I'll do it; but it is hard to be persecuted this way, for there are lots of other fellows who might go, and—"

"And would be glad to, yes, jump at the chance to distinguish themselves, not to speak of saving that noble man, Cody, from a cruel death, perhaps."

"Oh, I'll go, Powell, only it will be hard to give up the comfort of quarters, and sleep out, and eat camp grub—good-by," and the disconsolate officer departed, and soon after reported at the general's office, booted and spurred.

"My men are in the saddle, sir, and the guide at the head," he said to the general, who smiled at his woe-begone look.

"Very well, Blackford, get off at once, and your duty is to find Buffalo Bill, note all signs of red-skins on the way, cross the trails leading to the fort, and if you can hit a blow at that band of outlaws known as Brimstones, do so."

"You have forty men?"

"Yes, sir, with two sergeants, four corporals and two scouts."

"All right, and remember that Texas Jack is one worthy to ask advice of, and he knows what he is about, so be governed by his opinion on this trip."

"Yes, general," and Lieutenant Blackford did not see that the compliment to Texas Jack might be a reflection that he did not know what he was about.

Burke Blackford cast a longing look into the parlors, as though he would have given much to exhibit himself before Kate Kennerley in "marching trim," and have a word of farewell; but just then she seemed to be quite devoted to a young officer who was talking to her, and with a sigh he went out, mounted his horse, and rode out of the fort at the head of his command, asking Texas Jack as they did so:

"Now in the name of the saints where are we going, scout?"

"You have no orders, sir?"

"Yes, they are about as generous as though the general had told me to search the wide, wide world."

"The expedition is to hunt for Cody, sir, is it not?"

"Yes, to hunt for a needle in a haystack, or about that."

"Then I will find the stack, sir, and then we can look for the needle," said Jack, who had already had his instructions from General Carr as to where to look for Buffalo Bill.

The night passed away, and the following day the fact that Burke Blackford had been sent off on an expedition of peril and hardship afforded general rejoicing and amusement, not only in the officers' quarters, but among the men, for the latter were often wont to say that for so young a man the lieutenant could "play old soldier" to perfection.

The "bachelors' club," of which Blackford was a member, hoisted their flag in honor of the event, and his health was drank at the various messes.

The afternoon of the day following his departure, a courier was sighted riding at full speed for the fort.

He was recognized as the regular mail-courier along the outpost line, but it was seldom that he was known to ride so like the wind, so it was surmised that he bore dispatches.

Up he dashed, threw the mail-bags to the fort postmaster, and dismounting, went at once to the quarters of General Carr to whose presence he was at once admitted.

"Station-agent Bruce gave me this letter for you, general, and said it was to be delivered with all haste, so I rode hard, sir."

The general took the letter, praised the courier for his hard riding, and, breaking the seal, uttered an exclamation of pleasure, while he said:

"Good for Cody! he's not dead yet."

Then he read the letter which Buffalo Bill had written at the station and given to Bruce to send by the courier.

It told in cipher writing all that the scout had done, from his joining the band until he had finished his first run as an outlaw courier.

The letter suggested that soldiers should be sent with the train that was to be robbed and hidden in the ambulances so as to surprise the outlaws, and that the extra Overland coach should carry an officer and squad of men to also act with the Brimstones.

The emigrant train that was coming West might be followed by a troop of cavalry and the people put on their guard, so that the Brimstones' three attacks might not only prove a failure, but end in their being wiped out:

The letter ended with:

"I could not have gotten a place to suit me better than outlaw courier, and I'll come out all right if some of the outlaws or Indians do not kill me for Buffalo Bill, or the soldiers shoot me for the Deserter Sergeant."

"I at least will be able to guide a command to the Brimstones' retreat, and to Saw Face the Renegade's stronghold."

"If I can dash in, on my rounds, and give you half an hour's call at the fort, I will do so."

"Bravo for Buffalo Bill!" cried the general, enthusiastic over the good work of the scout.

Then he added:

"Now what will Blackford do—just spoil all I fear, and yet it will be impossible to recall him now."

Sending for Major Denton, he told him just what Cody was doing and read him the letter.

The major shook his head and said:

"Cody is the bravest of the brave, but he certainly has taken desperate chances, and I wish he was well out of it."

"Does he refer to Forrester in the letter, general?"

"Merely to say that he has heard nothing yet of his robbery by the outlaws."

"Too bad; but this is a strange freak of his, going off alone?"

"Strange, indeed, and do you know, Powell came to me awhile ago and asked to also go alone on the trail."

"My word for it he has gone on Forrester's trail."

"Just my idea, and to also find Cody, for he is like a brother to him, and he is second only to Buffalo Bill as a scout."

"I hope something will come of it all," said the major.

All that day the fort was anxious over the happenings of late, the mystery overhanging Buffalo Bill, for the general did not report hearing from him, the departure of Captain Forrester alone, the going of Blackford and his troop, and then taking the trail of Surgeon Powell.

Then too there were three officers sent off with different squads, on secret work to those in the fort, but which were to go and guard the officers' train, the emigrant outfit and extra coach, as Buffalo Bill had suggested.

Two days after another courier was reported coming like the very wind on the way to the fort.

As he drew near it was noticed that he was masked with a handkerchief, had the brim of his hat tied down upon each side of his face, wore a blanket thrown over his head, through a hole in the middle and had a pair of loose-made leggings that came almost to the toes of his moccasins.

If he carried arms they were not visible, and his horse had only a lariat bridle and a blanket saddle.

"I am a courier and must see ther gin'ral at onc't, Pard Soger," he said with a whining voice.

He was led at once to the general's quarters, and asked for a:

"Privit' intervoo, gin'ral, ef yer pleases."

It was granted, and when alone the handkerchief and hat were removed and the general exclaimed:

"Buffalo Bill!"

CHAPTER LI.

STARTLING NEWS.

"YES, general, I am Cody, and in masquerade, for I am riding courier for the Brimstone Brotherhood now, so slipped off the trail to run in here, and disguised myself, as you see, to let no one know that I was here."

"Well, Bill, you are disguised, that is certain, and I never would have known you; but I am glad indeed to see you safe."

"Safe so far, general, and prospects good to continue so; but I have bad news, general."

"Indeed!"

"You got my letter by the mail courier, sir?"

"Yes, and was glad to see that you were alive, for I had become so anxious that I sent Blackford, with forty men, with Texas Jack as guide, to search for you."

"I am sorry, sir; but then, Jack will be discreet."

"I crossed their trail, sir, and about know where they are. I wish you would let me order them into secret camp until needed."

"Do so; but I congratulate you upon your work so far."

"Now to your news."

"Captain Forrester is not here?"

"No, but how do you know?"

"Nor Surgeon Powell?"

"You are well posted, Cody."

"I have seen them both, sir."

"Ah! Powell found him, then?"

"I found Captain Forrester, I regret to say, sir, in the outlaw camp, and more than friendly with Captain Brimstone."

"Great God!"

"I make no charges, general, and there may yet be some reason for the captain's conduct; but I rode here to tell you what I had seen."

"On my way I met Surgeon Powell, following the captain's trail, and I told him what I had seen, and he will stick to the captain's trail, so we will get at the truth."

"And Forrester knew you?"

"I was masked, sir, and he did not know me, and I left almost immediately with further orders from Captain Brimstone for his separate bands."

"Now, general, as I cannot make myself known to the party under Lieutenant Blackford, please give me an order for them to obey me, and I believe we can do good service for you."

The order was given, the scout resumed his handkerchief and hat as before, and rode out of the fort unknown to all who saw him.

Two days after a horseman was seen approaching the fort, and soon after it was reported that Captain Forrester was returning.

He rode into the fort, white-faced and stern, and saluting only when necessary, and straight to his quarters he went.

Half an hour after he appeared in dress uniform and wended his way to the quarters of the paymaster.

There were a number of officers present, not one of whom he noticed, except the paymaster, and to him he said in a voice that all distinctly heard:

"Captain Bowen, you have heard that when dying on the plains one night Captain Lucius Kennerley intrusted to my care a package of Government money, the value of which was twenty thousand dollars."

"Here is the package, sir, unbroken, the seals intact, as you see, so give me a receipt for the same, as soon as you have seen that it is all right."

"I really congratulate you, Captain Forrester, and—"

"I asked for a receipt, sir, not congratulations, which I neither desire or will receive."

The paymaster flinched at this stern interruption of his words, and was silent, for he had been especially bitter against Forrester; but he turned and wrote the receipt; while a young officer, with more curiosity than discretion, and who had also been pronounced in his denunciation of the captain, said:

"May I ask, Captain Forrester, if you were so fortunate as to find Miss Kennerley's money, also?"

"That, Lieutenant Ames Tahott, is none of your business, unless Miss Kennerley has bestowed upon you the right to look after her affairs."

The words were biting in their utterance and sarcasm, and the meddling lieutenant was completely squelched and deeply mortified at the looks of his brother officers, who enjoyed his downfall and mentally congratulated themselves that they had not been the ones to draw the fire of the irate captain by any questions.

Taking the receipt of the paymaster, Forrester read it with the utmost care and said:

"Yes, this is all right, and relieves me of further care in this matter."

And turning on his heel he left the office and an unpleasant feeling behind him, for all felt that perhaps they had made a grave error in treating the young officer as they had done.

Watching the officer they saw him go at once to the quarters of General Carr.

That gentleman had not heard of his arrival, and was somewhat startled at his appearance before him.

But, without waiting to be addressed, Fred Forrester said:

"General Carr, I have to report my return, sir, and more, that I bring back with me the money intrusted to me by Captain Kennerley when dying."

"I have just given to Paymaster Bowen the package of twenty thousand dollars of Government money and hold his receipt for it, and now shall hand to Miss Kennerley the money and papers that belong to her; but I would ask a private interview with you to-night, sir, as I have something to make known to you."

"My dear Forrester, I congratulate you. I assure you, upon what you have done, and I feel assured that your explanation to-night will remove a very unpleasant impression from my mind."

"Go at once to Miss Kennerley, and come to me at eight o'clock."

The officer bowed, and as he departed the general muttered:

"He may have gone to the outlaw camp, but I do not yet condemn him."

"I will hear his story first, for it is hard to believe that splendid man can be a villain."

CHAPTER LII.

A LEAF FROM THE PAST.

KATE KENNERLEY'S face flushed as her maid entered her room and said:

"Miss Kate, Captain Forrester is in the parlor, and asked for you."

"I did not know that Captain Forrester had returned."

"Yes, miss, he got back just half an hour ago, the general's orderly said."

"I will go down at once."

And, after a few changes in her toilet, Kate Kennerley glided into the parlor and saluted pleasantly:

"Welcome back, Captain Forrester!"

"Thank you, Miss Kennerley."

And the officer hesitated a moment and then said:

"Miss Kennerley, before I left some days ago I offered you a check for the the sum I owed you—"

"Pardon me, sir, but you owe me nothing, and I so told you then. Since your departure I learned that you fairly robbed your pretty quarters to get the money to pay me back what was my loss, not yours, as the money was taken from you."

"Under such circumstances I refused your check, and I certainly shall not change my mind, though I feel deeply grateful to you, Captain Forrester, for what you have done in your effort to repay me."

And Kate spoke very earnestly.

"You certainly cannot refuse to accept what is your own along with the papers which were taken from me and the watch and other things taken from your uncle's body by me."

"Captain Forrester, have you those things?" she asked, in an almost startled tone, which he could not fail to observe.

"I have, for here is the package of money, the papers and all else which were intrusted to me by Captain Kennerley for you, and, permit me to add, in justice to myself, that I have just paid over to Paymaster Bowen the money which I held for the Government and was robbed of."

"Oh, Captain Forrester, how glad I am for your sake! But how did you manage to get them?" she cried, as he placed the money and articles in her hands.

His face flushed, but he replied, firmly:

"Pardon me, Miss Kennerley, but that I cannot make known to you, for it is a secret."

There was a certain sadness in his manner which she did not fail to notice, but he quickly added:

"Miss Kennerley, I thank you most sincerely for your kind confidence in me through all my misfortunes, and, believe me, I more than appreciate it."

He bowed and turned quickly away, and after a moment of silent wondering, Kate Kennerley ran off to tell Mrs. Denton the good news.

In the mean time Fred Forrester returned to his quarters, and a grim smile rested upon his face as he gazed around him.

"Paintings, *bric-a-brac*, silver service, all sold, but the sacrifice was needed. I lived in too great luxury for a poor lieutenant, and my ways were too wild, so I had my fall—and such a fall!"

"But the heel of those who drank my wines, ate my dinners, borrowed money from me, and then in my misfortune turned their backs, I never let fall upon my neck and crush me."

"I thought human nature was kinder, that friendship was truer; but I erred sadly, yet I have learned a lesson—ay, a cruel, a bitter one."

"Well, my quarters look shabby now, and I am as economical as a country parson on a few hundred a year."

"But that money was paid back, and to-day I do not owe a dollar in the world, have a check for five thousand dollars in my pocket, two months' pay due, and so am not so badly off after all."

And so musing, he passed the hours until his servant called him to dinner, after which he repaired to the quarters of General Carr to keep his appointment.

The general received him pleasantly, on the piazza of his quarters. There were many present, while the hush that fell upon all, at his approach, told him that he had been the subject of conversation.

A number now bowed to him, but his haughty response to some of the ladies, and his cold stare at the officers, made them regret their sudden change, upon having heard the money had been returned.

Into the private office of the general he went, and there his commander soon joined him.

"General, I do not wish to detain you, but I wish to tell you something, and in the strictest confidence, if you will so receive it."

"Certainly, Forrester. Sit down and we

will talk it over," said the general, in a kindly tone.

"You, sir, have been my friend, in spite of the clouds upon me, and I feel that I owe it to your trust in me, yours and Major Denton's, that I was not found guilty by the court-martial and disgraced."

"You know that I was intrusted with money, valuables and papers, by Captain Kennerley, and that I reported having been robbed of them."

"As I paid my debts after my return to the fort from money I said had been paid to me by Gambler Gaul, my honor was doubted, and the trial followed."

"I was robbed, sir, but, acquitted, I sold out all my valuables to pay Miss Kennerley back her money, intending then to draw only actual living expenses from the paymaster, and devote all else toward paying back the Government loss."

"Now, sir, let me tell you that I was the heir of an uncle, now dead, who was a very rich man, but one so severely moral he could not tolerate any wild acts on my part."

"When a cadet at West Point, my life was saved by a young girl, who overheard a plot of two men to kill and rob me on a steamboat while en route to New York with a large amount of money belonging to some officers, and my class-mates."

"I was won by her beauty—in fact, fascinated by her."

"Her home was on the Hudson, near the Point. She was the daughter of a doctor, who had left her mother and herself a small home and income enough to support them. There was also a wild son then away, no one knew where."

"The mother was a designing woman, the daughter even worse—a devil with the face of an angel, and I was won over into a secret marriage with Ruby Roberts, for such was her name."

"I intended, after graduating, to take her to my uncle's home; but she and her brother wrote my uncle, told him all, and he cut me off without a dollar, and that won me the hatred of both the mother and daughter, and I knew them in their true light."

"I came West, but divided my pay regularly with the woman I had unfortunately married, and some time after my uncle died and left me nothing."

"My marriage I still kept secret, and I had received a notice of when my young wife had run away with a noted gambler, she being spoken of by her maiden name."

"She, my wife, had a brother, a reckless fellow, who ran away from home—his name was Benson Roberts, but he enlisted in the army as Robert Benson, and—"

"Ha! the Deserter Sergeant?"

"Yes, general, so you see there was a bad streak in their blood, for he is now a fugitive and an outlaw."

"He is dead, Forrester."

"Dead, sir?"

"Yes, and I will tell you in confidence of his death, for it is a secret just now," and the general made the story known, of how Buffalo Bill had killed the Deserter Sergeant.

Then Fred Forrester continued:

"I supposed I was well rid of my wife, and intended to quietly get a divorce some day, but she has turned up again and proves that she did not run off, but put the notice in the paper to place me off my guard."

"I, however, wish to tell you, sir, of another unfortunate connection in my life."

"My father was married twice, and a son by his first wife, some ten years my senior, grew up to be a very wicked man."

"My father died while I was at West Point, my first year, and he left as his sole executor his brother, Edmund Allyn Forrester, making me the heir, for my brother was dead, and leaving my half-brother but ten thousand dollars."

"But, my Uncle Edmund was dead, killed in a railway accident, and my half-brother claimed to be the one meant, for there was nothing to show that father had intended his brother, not his son, who bore the same name, as executor."

"There was nothing to prevent him from taking possession, and no bonds to secure me against loss, and the result was that Edmund gambled every dollar I had away before I was three years a cadet."

"Then he got into a killing affair, and fled to the West."

"To shorten my story, sir, let me say that he was known to you as Gambler Gaul—"

"Ah, indeed? You have a strange story to tell, Forrester."

"It is stranger yet, sir," was the reply of the young soldier, and his voice was full of sadness, his face very pale, but firm, for he had made up his mind to tell all the cruel story of the past and the present.

CHAPTER LIII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

"Now, general," continued Fred Forrester, "I never spoke to my half-brother, nor pretended to know him, while he was at the fort."

"Up at the post one night he was gambling

heavily, and every one was losing who played against him."

"I had a hundred dollars in my pocket, and, in sheer desperation, sat down and staked it upon a game with him, after the playing was over and he sat alone at the table."

"I won, and I doubled, and doubled again as I continued to win, until I rose from the table five thousand dollars the winner."

"I refused to take the money from him, but walked away, satisfied with my revenge, for I had hurt him, I could well see."

"I met him one day on the plains, and when I was desperate almost for money, and we were alone."

"He called to me and said:—"

"Here is your money, Fred, which you fairly won from me."

"Pray, take it, as I am superstitious enough to feel I shall never have another day of luck."

"I took the money without a word and rode on, so you know I told the truth when I said Gambler Gaul had paid it to me."

"Now, General Carr, let me return to my wife, and show you how truth shames fiction sometimes in romance."

"You doubtless saw how I was startled one day after parade when I saw Billie Blew, the Boy Bugler?"

"I did notice it."

"Well, sir, that is no boy, but my wife!"

"Forrester?"

"It is so, sir, and she came on with Captain Kennerley's outfit, and it was her false story to him, about my having wronged her sister, and squandered her money that turned him against me."

"I sent for her to come to my quarters that night—Powell sent for her, for he was in my quarters when she played a ballad on the bugle which I had taught Billie, and then I was sure it was my wife, though I told Frank Powell nothing."

"She came, and she told me she had come for money. She said she could prove, by witnesses, that I had stolen the money, and she demanded twenty thousand dollars."

"We compromised for a month, and I left the fort, as you know. I went to find Gambler Gaul, to have his proof that he paid me that money, and more to see if he would give me, from what he had defrauded me of, money to pay this woman off and get rid of her, for I wanted no more scandal, fearing disgrace and dismissal."

"Gaul had given the name, the day he gave me the money, of a man who he said would always know where he was."

"So I found this man and he directed me to him."

"I must tell you, sir, that I found him in camp, metamorphosed into none other than Captain Brimstone, of the Brimstone Brotherhood."

"I told him why I had come, and begged him to help me."

"To my surprise I found that he had some sense of honor, and it will surprise you to know that some of his men had robbed me of the money I had in keeping, and had gone to a place to divide it when suddenly he rode upon them."

"He heard their story, had seen me, so took the saddle-bags and kept them inviolate, for he said he knew that they had not belonged to me, and I might get into trouble about their loss, so he would some day return them to me."

"Busy in organizing his band, he had forgotten me, until one of his men led me to him, for the one I had asked about his whereabouts had told me to search for Captain Brimstone."

"So it was, general, that I got back the stolen property, and my unfortunate half-brother gave over all to me, while he said that he had turned robber, and I would wish less than ever to own him as a brother."

"I could but thank him, and with a warning that his career must soon end on the gallows, left him."

"How strange a story, and you have my sympathy, Forrester, with my congratulations upon your success; but pray continue."

"There is little more to tell, sir, for I told him, if ordered, I would go upon his trail, and when some miles from his camp I came face to face with Surgeon Powell, who was following my trail."

"He told me frankly that he had followed me, to aid me if I needed aid, and to know why I had gone off so mysteriously alone."

"I know his noble friendship for me, and I told him my story, in confidence, as I have you."

"Then he said that Cody had met him, and was all right, and this I was glad to hear."

"Our horses were tired, and we went into camp, and did not move until the next morning, when we started for the fort, and a couple of hours after crossed a trail which Powell said he knew was left by Buffalo Bill's horse."

"We followed it rapidly, and after some miles came in sight of him and halted, so he halted."

"Then I made known my story, and he came out with his, told just the daring game he was playing, that he had seen me in the camp of the

Brimstone Brotherhood the day before, and had, while riding as outlaw courier, gone to the fort and reported to you, having disguised himself and left his saddle and other things in some timber not far away from Fort Fairview.

"He said he was going to have the force under Lieutenant Blackford await him at a certain place, and then arrange to have them sweep down upon the three bands of outlaws one after the other.

"While we were talking we heard distant firing, and we knew it must be Blackford and redskins.

"So we rode rapidly to the scene, arrived just after dark, and, fortunately, just in time, for Lieutenant Blackford admitted that our coming saved them, as the redskins broke under our fire, believing that large reinforcements had arrived.

"We pursued for a few miles, and then returned to bury the dead, and, fortunately, Powell was along to look after the wounded, who were removed to Hill station on the stage trail."

"Did Blackford lose many?"

"Two killed, sir, and seven wounded."

"And the redskins?"

"We buried thirteen braves and captured five of their wounded, but their loss was as much more, I think, only they carried the others off with them."

"Then they were in force?"

"Yes, sir; fully two hundred of them, under Chief Snow Face himself."

"Indeed! then Blackford caught a Tartar?"

"Yes, sir; he attacked Snow Face and half a hundred in camp, Texas Jack surprising them; but the larger force had not come up, and they turned the tables in favor of their chief."

"As you did in favor of Blackford."

"We were so fortunate, general."

"How did Blackford handle his men?"

"Splendidly, sir, though he grumbled terribly after the fight at losing his gloves, a box of cigars and an india-rubber pillow. He is a brave fellow, general."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Forrester; but what more of your story?"

And General Carr offered a cigar to the young officer as a hint, it seemed, that he was not being bored by the long story he was listening to.

CHAPTER LIV.

EXIT BILLIE BLEW.

"UNDER the circumstances, General Carr," resumed Captain Fred Forrester, "Surgeon Powell decided that it was his duty to remain with the wounded, and he did so."

"He was right; and you came on to the fort?"

"Yes, sir."

"Blackford knows nothing of your story?"

"No, sir; nor do I intend to make it known to other than yourself, Powell and Cody."

"And Major Denton?"

"Much as I respect him, sir—yes, and others—I prefer that they should still treat me as they deem best upon the findings of the court-martial."

"You intend to make no explanation of your getting the money back?"

"None, sir."

"This will look strange, Forrester."

"I care not, sir, more than to have you say, if you will, that I reported to you, and if you are satisfied, to so state."

"I am, and I will so say if asked."

"Thank you, sir."

"But about Cody?"

"He went on playing the part of outlaw courier, but is to return when he has his plans arranged, and lead Blackford and his men to pounce down upon the three bands of Captain Brimstone."

"I could have gone, sir, but preferred not to do so under the circumstances, for Edmund Forrester was kind to me in my early boyhood, and I loved him dearly."

"It is best that you did not go."

Then, too, I did not wish to take the command from Blackford."

"This was generous in you, and I believe your strongest motive, Forrester."

"No, general, for I had no desire to lose that money again; but now, sir, let me ask you about my wife, now here as Billie Blew."

"I am ready to help you in any way in my power, Forrester."

"I feel that, sir."

"What do you think is best to be done?"

"I wish her to leave the fort, general, by the train that departs to-morrow."

"A good idea."

"She need not be known by other name than she now bears, and if you could give an order discharging her from service, as under years, and from having been requested to do so by one who is her guardian—"

"All of which is true, or about so, Forrester."

"Yes, sir, and she can depart Eastward, as though to her home, for you can place her in charge of the officer in command of the train, who can see her to the railway-station."

"That is best."

"And I have here, sir, a draft on New York, as the result of my sale, and which I was to pay to Miss Kennerley."

"This I will give to her, upon condition that she goes away, obtains a divorce from me and never crosses my path again."

"Will she do it?"

"I hope so, sir, and if you will kindly send for her, we will see."

An orderly was called, and Billie Blew, the Boy Bugler, was ordered to come at once to the office of the general.

Soon after he, if I may yet so speak of him, entered, with his natty air and pleasant smile, and saluted gracefully, but with a slight change of color, the keen eyes of the general noticed, as he caught sight of the captain.

"Bugler Blew, I wish to ask you a few questions," said the general, quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you run away from home to come here?" and the general glanced at a letter he held in his hand as though it was prompting his remarks.

"No, sir."

"Did you know that a certain youth was advertised as a runaway, and was wanted at home?"

"I did not, sir," and the face regained its color, as the bugler seemed to feel that it was not through Fred Forrester he had been sent for.

"Where were you born, bugler?"

"On the Hudson's banks, sir, New York."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen, sir."

"Parents living?"

"No, sir, I am all alone."

"Well, Blew, I have just this to say to you, and it is that you are to leave this fort at daylight in the morning with the train going East, and I will place you in charge of an officer who will see you in safety on board a train at the railroad."

"But, general, sir, why, may I ask, do you order this?"

"Because you are no boy, but a woman."

"Ha! that man Fred Forrester has betrayed me."

"I have told the general all," was the quiet reply.

"And may I tell my story, sir?"

"Yes, but you have just told me falsehoods, and I will hardly believe you now."

"Do you know that that man stole that money, as I can prove?"

"I know that he has returned the identical packages that he was robbed of."

"It is useless, Mrs. Forrester, for you to try to influence me, for I know the truth, and you must go from here."

"Not an inch will I move."

"Ruby, I have here a draft for five thousand dollars, and it is from the sale of my gathering of souvenirs and other things collected the last few years."

"I will make this draft payable to you, and will pay your fare back to New York, and then it shall be your duty to procure a divorce from me, and have my lawyer send me the papers."

"Thus we are free of each other, and forever."

"I will not go, Fred Forrester."

"You refuse?"

"Emphatically, yes."

"Then, Ruby, much as it pains me to do so, I shall ask the general to arrest you and send you to New York to be tried for—"

He paused, and she looked at him defiantly.

Then he continued:

"I have told no one, but I have all the proof, and I will now make the charge against you to the general, and, asking leave, will go to New York and press the charge of—"

"No, no, no! I yield! Don't let yours be the hand, Fred, to lead me to the gallows."

The words fairly burst from her lips, and the general saw how she had condemned herself, and said sternly:

"Mrs. Forrester, I am glad you accept the mercy your husband extends you."

"Here you are known only as a youth, and so I wish it to be."

"Go to your quarters and be ready to leave at the hour named, for I shall have the officer informed that he is to take you in charge."

"I will go, sir; but I will see you again, Fred?"

"No, here is your draft and money. You know all that I ask, and I shall expect you to obey, Ruby, and, if you can, may you live a happy life. Good-by!"

She seemed as if about to spring toward him, then changed her mind, saluted the general and strode from the room.

"What a beautiful woman, and what a strange heart her face hides!" murmured the general, and he added:

"Now, Forrester, come with me into the parlors."

"No, thank you, general; I will go to my quarters now," and the young officer departed, while the general's perfect satisfaction with the manner in which the money had been returned by Fred Forrester put an end to innuendoes against his having had it all the time hidden away.

The next morning the "Boy Bugler" had

gone with the train, to the regret of many, and it was said that his mother had had him sent back home to her.

Such was the story floating about the fort, and no one contradicted it.

That night a courier arrived from Lieutenant Blackford, asking for reinforcements, and Captain Forrester departed with sixty men in obedience to the call, which was urgent.

CHAPTER LV

CONCLUSION.

THE reason of Lieutenant Blackford sending for aid was on account of the arrival in his camp of Buffalo Bill, who reported that Snow Face, with a large force, was again on the war-path, and just as he had come to report all ready for the command to attack the three bands of outlaws.

After a consultation between the scout, Surgeon Powell and lieutenant, it was decided to send to the fort for a force to head off Snow Face, while Buffalo Bill led the command of Blackford against the outlaws. Texas Jack meeting the troops from Fort Fairview and leading them against the redskins.

Both plans worked well, only the outlaws were not all in camp Number Three, the first one attacked, and some escaped.

Camp Number Two was approached cautiously, but an outlaw hunting game saw them and ran off with the news, and thus there were other escapes, one of whom, well-mounted, kept ahead of the soldiers and gave the warning to Captain Brimstone.

As he was in soldier uniform, Buffalo Bill was not recognized as the Deserter Sergeant by the outlaws, so the treachery was not laid against him.

Retreating toward the Sioux country, Captain Brimstone sent a courier on ahead to notify his ally, Snow Face, and the man sent that person flying back to his stronghold with a very badly-whipped band of Sioux at his heels, who had run upon Fred Forrester and his command.

The news of the outlaw courier startled Snow Face, and he sent him back to tell the outlaw chief to come on to a certain point and there await to hear from him, as the Sioux intended to change their stronghold.

But, with the defeated outlaw and the renegade chief, and the mystery that drove the one to hide from the other, and to keep the secret of the mysterious white woman in the Indian village, I have nothing more to do, so will speak a word of those characters of my story who have come more prominently before my readers.

It may have been revenge in Ruby Forrester, not to get the divorce from her husband, but, certain it was, she did not, and, though loving Kate Kennerley, the secret he bore in his heart prevented him from telling her of his love, and asking her to become his wife.

Doctor Frank Powell is now living in Wisconsin, honored by all who know him, and true as steel to Buffalo Bill, his Border Brother, as he calls him.

General Carr bears the honors he has won most gracefully, while Buffalo Bill, whose brand upon the Brimstone Brotherhood afterward served him well, has won fame and riches, and to-day is known the world over as the great hero of the Wild West, while his prairie pard, Texas Jack, has crossed the River of Death into the Bivouac of the Dead.

THE END.

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